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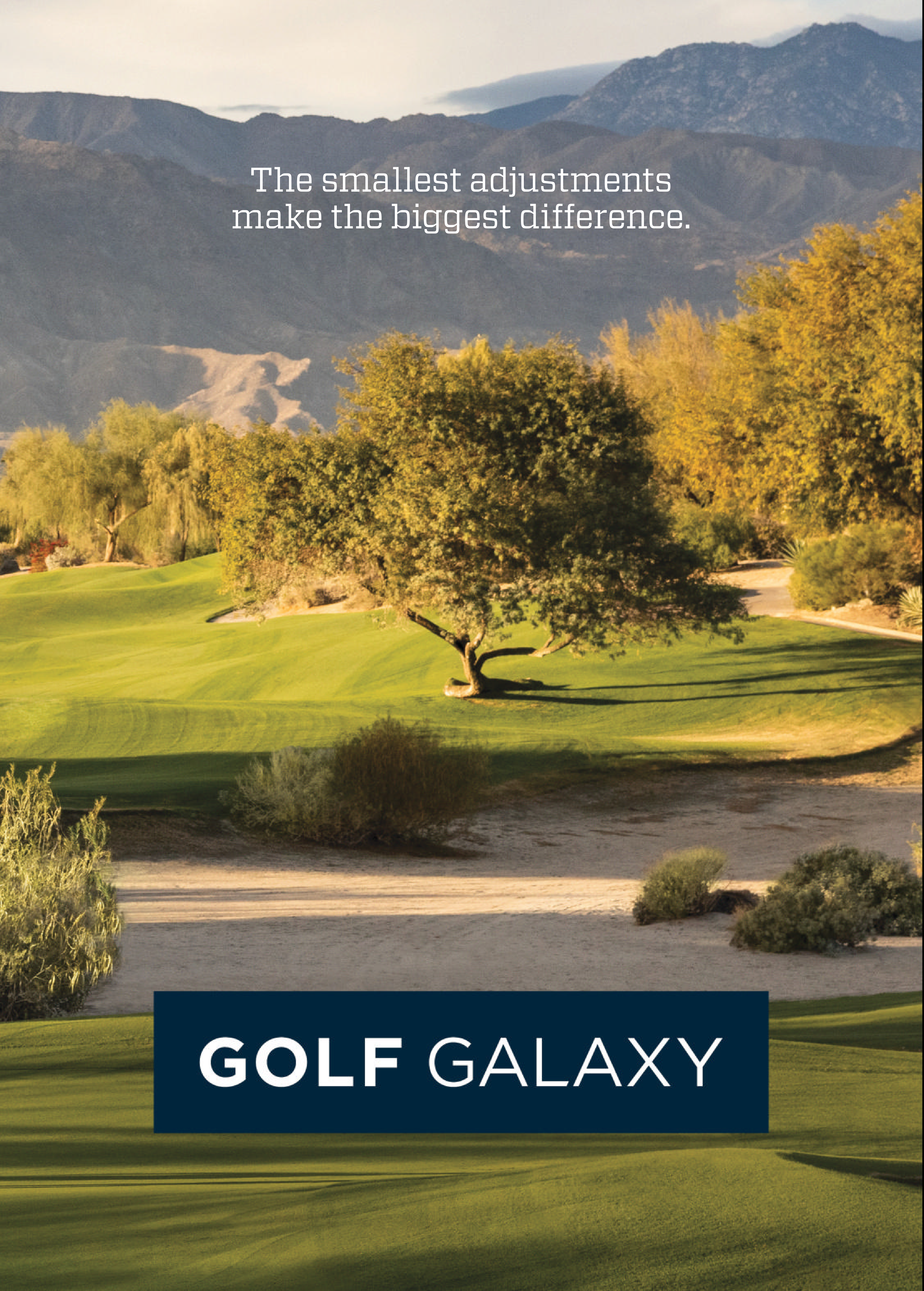
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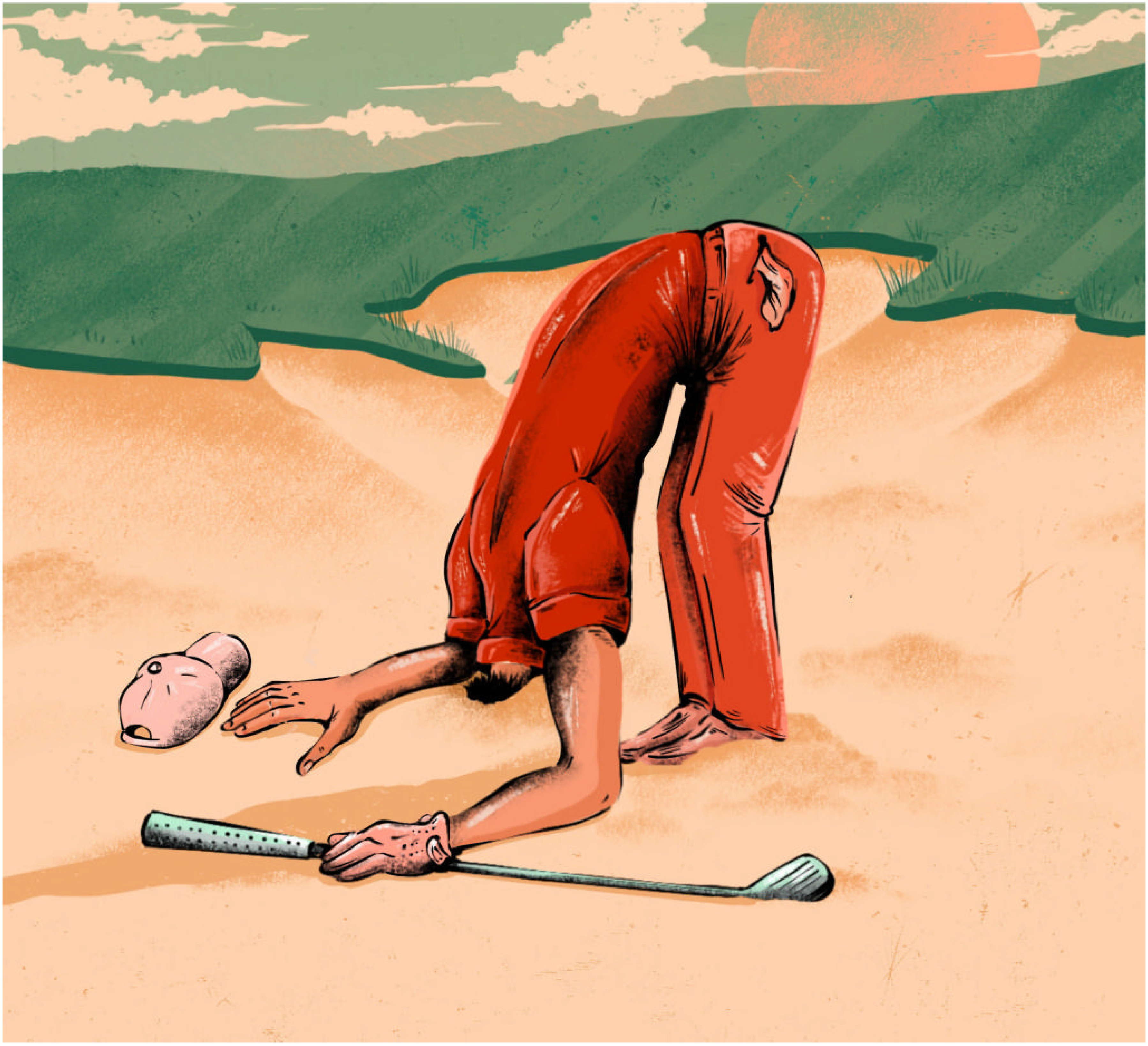
Blind Optimism

How the proposal to roll back the ball will upend average golfers, too

By Max Adler



ONE OF GOLF'S so-called dirty secrets is that nobody gets better. The initial descent in scoring is thrilling, but the bottom is long and flat. Any tiny dips we tend to misidentify as progress, and the tiny bumps, particularly for golfers of a certain vintage, often mean you're getting worse. Luckily, most of us share something like the same evolutionary quirk that prompted the first ostrich to bury its head in the sand. Blind optimism keeps the game fun. Next hole, next round, next season: That's when we're really going to put it all together.

When I was a teenager, I spent some time in a shop with a head pro who, if we were alone, would gaze out the window toward the first tee and provide commentary in a monotone and despondent voice. He would predict the shots: a pop-up slice to the opposite fairway, a ground hook O.B., etc. When he really nailed one, he didn't show a trace of smugness or satisfaction.

"Why do they bother, Max? What

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keeps them going?" It was rhetorically understood I wasn't to answer.

All these years later, I think I have an answer, and it's that reports of golfer stagnancy have been grossly exaggerated.

Not until 2020 did the USGA consolidate all the state handicapping systems into a central database. It now updates in real time, and the last I checked, the average handicap for a male was 14.1 and 28.0 for a female. That's down from 16.3 and 29.4, respectively, in 1996, which was that summer I was hanging in the golf shop.

Of course, about one in five golfers keeps an official handicap, so these stats are worth only so much. Let's consider the U.S. Mid Amateur, the championship for everybody over age 25 who isn't a pro. The idea, as you might know, is to keep out the college kids to make it a true competition among those who have jobs, families, and presumably the other distractions of well-balanced lives. The average 18-hole score to qualify for this national event dropped from 71.2 in 2002 to 68.6 in 2022. In the U.S. Amateur Four-Ball, the two-player team event that honors the mistake- and glory-ridden "best-ball" format many of us play on weekends, the average score to qualify in 2022 was 63.6(!), down from 65.2 in its inaugural year of 2014. As a regular contributor of entry fees across roughly this same span, I can assure you the course setups are not getting easier. Total entries are up, as is the amount of grousing about the number of reinstated amateurs—or "reconstituted" as one of my regular golf buds calls anyone who had a cup of coffee on a pro mini tour—but this is besides the main point.

We're getting better. And why shouldn't we be? It's what humans do. Today's golfers are athletes whose performance is supported by intelligence that's becoming harder to recognize as artificial. Smarter technology is built into our clubs, watches, simulators, on-course decision making, and more. The kids know what's up. In the U.S. Girls Junior Amateur, the average score to qualify has plummeted from 76.2 to 72.2 in two decades.

If you're a low-net guy, you might be saying, "Who cares?" These "elite" amateur tournaments, filled with spindly high schoolers gunning for college scholarships and too-tan insurance brokers, are for a sliver of the golf population. But golf shifts as a unit. If the pinnacles of recreational play have become this much more competitive, it reasons that so has your club championship, and so has the next flight down, all the way to the ninth flight and beyond. As a populace, we're getting better.

That there are more good players among us is something to celebrate! But, and please forgive an awkward transition, the new proposal to make some golf balls fly shorter (*see our history of how we got to here on page 30*) will spoil an important layer of the cake.

> **I sympathize with the governing bodies, but a unified set of rules is critical to the soul of golf.**

Now, there's a fairly high jerk quotient among scratch golfers. They ride your tail when they want to play through, whine about their putting as they're taking your money, and never seem to get ketchup on their shirts. But like them or not, the best players you know at your course allow for extrapolation and appreciation of just how incredible the pros on TV are. Although the proposed rule isn't really intended to target the distance of amateurs—there are plenty of successful ones who popcorn it 250 yards all day—messing with their world is to mess with everyone's.

Combining men's and women's, last year more than 10,000 dreamers entered U.S. Open qualifying. On their applications, no doubt many cited handicaps based on scores recorded playing alongside beginner buddies in Wednesday beer leagues. With two different golf balls, will people of varying abilities play together as much or as easily? Remember, golf shifts as a unit.

Although you'll encounter a rigid hierarchy of levels in many sports, any given golfer's schedule is a jumbled and happy matrix. A mediocre Division III college player is as likely to get paired with a future major champ in a state am as he is to get whupped by a grandmother in a mixed member-guest.

There is no athletic experience quite like a PGA Tour pro-am on a storied course. I enjoy playing with Delusional Dan the Dentist who talks about joining the senior tour when he turns 50. But the mere awareness of two different balls, to say nothing of the potential divergence in club technologies to optimize each ball, would tarnish all these games. It's fun to see how one stacks up, and from wild cross-pollination our game derives much health. Even if most of us have no plans to reach the clouds, it's nice that there's no ceiling blocking the view.

Sure, we could find a way to sort the handicaps derived from different equipment standards. Pro baseball has wood bats, and Little League and college play with aluminum. But golf is not adult softball.

I sympathize with the great predicament the governing bodies face. Par 5s are not meant to be reached with wedges, shot-shaping is a dying art, and building increasingly longer courses defies environmental and financial logic, but a unified set of rules is critical to the soul of golf.

The USGA has asked for comments, and this is mine. If you're passionate about the game, send an email to distanceinsights@usga.org.

I caught up with my old friend the pro, who's now a general manager gazing out a different window. He reminded me of all the tour pros who never played salable balls, instead insisting on special models or models from past years, so incredible was their feel and skill. He still doesn't like the proposal. As only he could summarize in his perfectly moribund way: "That we all play the same game is a really special idea, even if it's not true."

Max

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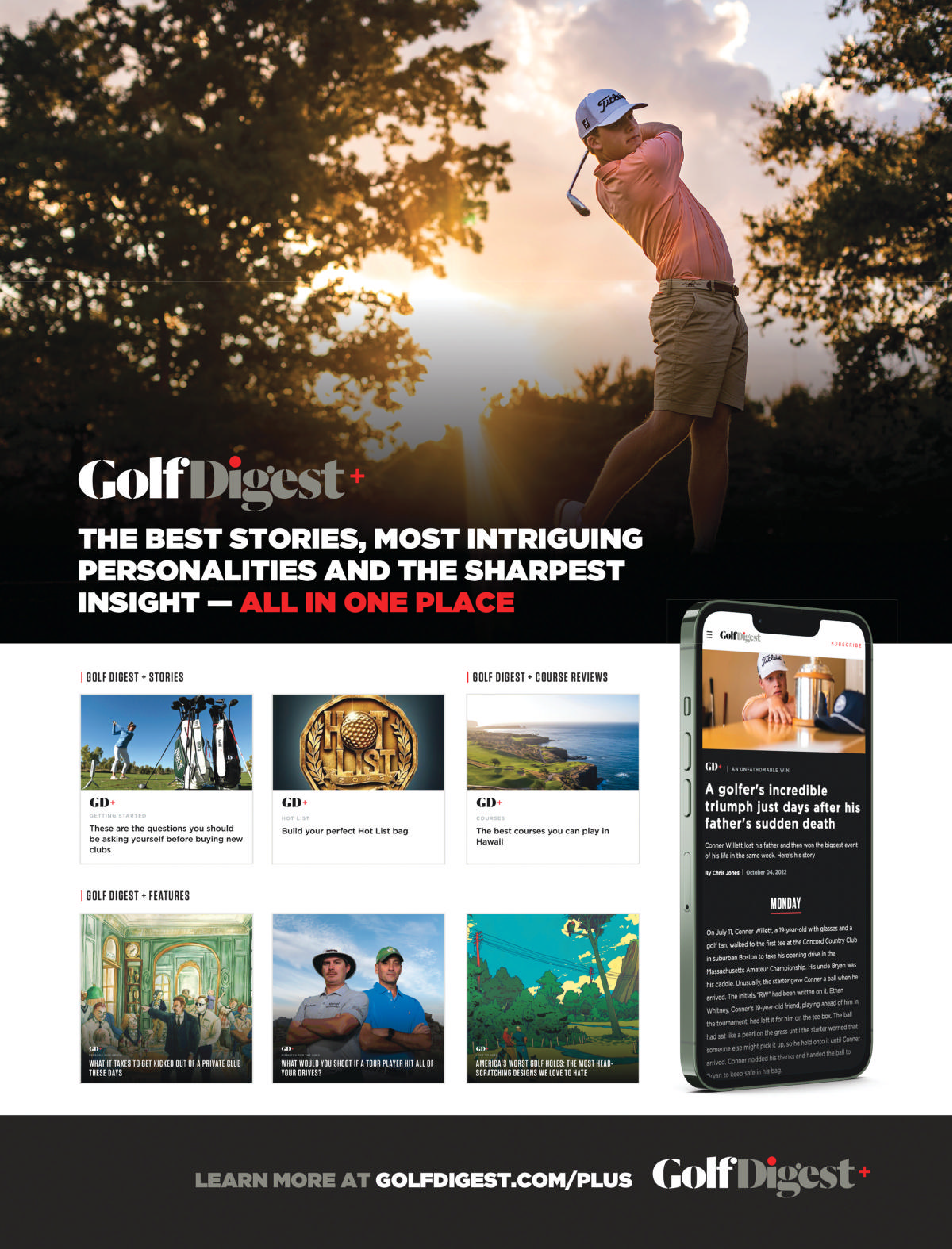

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GD+ | AN UNFATHOMABLE WIN

A golfer's incredible triumph just days after his father's sudden death

Conner Willett lost his father and then won the biggest event of his life in the same week. Here's his story

By Chris Jones | October 04, 2022

MONDAY

On July 11, Conner Willett, a 19-year-old with glasses and a golf tan, walked to the first tee at the Concord Country Club in suburban Boston to take his opening drive in the Massachusetts Amateur Championship. His uncle Bryan was his caddie. Unusually, the starter gave Conner a ball when he arrived. The initials "RW" had been written on it. Ethan Whitney, Conner's 19-year-old friend, playing ahead of him in the tournament, had left it for him on the tee box. The ball had sat like a pearl on the grass until the starter worried that someone else might pick it up, so he held onto it until Conner arrived. Conner nodded his thanks and handed the ball to Bryan to keep safe in his bag.

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TEE SHEET

MAY / 2023

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JEFFREY BERTCH

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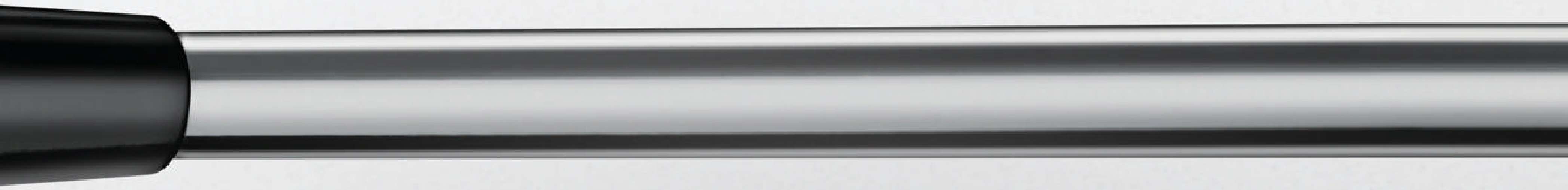

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‘I Got a Job as a Mortgage Loan Officer’

I hadn’t touched a club in a month when I agreed to play in a member-guest. The events that followed changed my life

By Ben Griffin with Keely Levins

IN 2021 I WAS BURNED OUT on mini-tours and couldn’t see myself making it to the PGA Tour. I’d lost my motivation and love for golf. The stress of playing with $15,000 of credit-card debt was agony, so I quit. I got a job as a mortgage loan officer and hadn’t touched a club in a month when I accepted an invitation to a member-guest tournament that changed my life.

My dad—who can still shoot under par on a good day—put a club in my hands when I started walking. My grandpa taught me you can try as hard as you can to beat the other guys but still be respectful. We belonged to Chapel Hill Country Club, a private course in North Carolina, until I was 12. Then the financial crisis of 2008 hit. My dad is in real estate, and my mom is a mortgage loan officer, so it hit us hard. We went from having a nice house to renting. We got rid of our golf membership. University of North Carolina Finley Golf Course, which is public, had a great junior golf rate, and I had friends there, so that’s where I started playing.

BEN GRIFFIN
PGA TOUR
AGE 27
LIVES ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GA.

* * *

That’s also where the University of North Carolina golf team plays. Once I started going to college there, my teammates would jokingly complain that qualifying wasn’t fair: I knew every break on those greens. I won two tournaments my freshman year. I thought I couldn’t be stopped: I would turn pro, play the Korn Ferry Tour, then make the PGA Tour right away. But that’s not what ended up happening—not even close.

* * *

I graduated and turned pro in 2018. I won almost immediately on PGA Tour Canada, but traveling on my own was like a punch in the face: I was staying in not-so-nice hotels, and I didn’t have the same resources I had had in college. Instead of playing for championships, guys are playing like they’re fighting for their lives.

* * *

The pressure turned me into a fearful golfer. If there was water to the right, my brain would say not to hit it right. The anxiety kept building, and I started playing bad golf. I obsessed over my equipment and swing. I became a perfectionist. You should focus on hitting shots, not hitting the right positions in your swing.

* * *

I played the Korn Ferry Tour in 2019, didn’t play well and played smaller tours until 2021. Without belief, I had nothing, so I quit, put my clubs away and became a mortgage loan officer. I said yes to that member-guest with my friend Mike Swann at Highland Springs in Missouri thinking it would just be fun. I shot 63 on my own ball. The course hosts a Korn Ferry event. Mike told me to fly back and play in the Monday qualifier. He’d pay for everything.

* * *

I wasn’t sure, but at home one morning I accidentally drove to the golf course instead of the office. It felt like a sign. A few days before the qualifier, my grandfather died. My parents said to play. I’d be home in time for the funeral on Wednesday. That tells you how we thought the qualifier would go.

* * *

I shot 65 to qualify for the Korn Ferry event but missed the cut. My grandpa always said, “Hit ’em long, hit ’em straight,” and when I saw that in his obituary, I knew I had to play professionally again. Mike and another friend, Jesse Ahearn, said they’d cover me through Q school. Highland members pooled together cash, and another good friend, Doug Sieg, said he’d pay all my expenses for two years. I wouldn’t have to worry about credit-card debt. I quit my job, overwhelmed by everyone’s support.

* * *

I vowed to myself to do it differently this time. I needed to stop drinking during the season. I didn’t have a drinking problem, but I was drinking like I was still in college. When you drink consistently, you think you feel good, but you don’t. Now I feel incredible.

* * *

My girlfriend introduced me to the vegan lifestyle, which also helped. Some people treat food like entertainment, but food is fuel. I eat for energy. Research says veganism helps with inflammation. I’ve never felt better. I used to be fatigued down the stretch, but now I feel fresh enough for another 18 after the tournament is over.

* * *

By September 2021 I was at Korn Ferry Q school. I made it through, had three runner-up finishes in 2022 and got my PGA Tour card for 2023. Then a month into the season, I had a shot at winning in Bermuda. It didn’t go my way, but that was my first time holding a lead going to the back nine of a tournament in a very long time.

* * *

I want to keep doing what I’m doing to feel fresh each week and soak in every experience because the PGA Tour is a pretty great place to play. It isn’t as bad as a lot of guys have made it out to be recently. I’ve seen what life outside of professional golf is. Being on the PGA Tour? Trust me, it’s pretty damn awesome.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH LETCHWORTH

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Undercover Caddie

Coping with verbal abuse is part of the job of looping on tour

WORKING IN SPORTS IS different from most jobs, but it's still a job. I'm sure some of you get chewed out by your bosses, but I doubt they talk to you the way some players talk to us. If you have played sports, you know heated exchanges among teammates and competitors are fairly common. I'm not condoning the language, but how many people really think twice about it?

That doesn't make what gets said easier to hear.

Curse words, putdowns and questions that are not so much questions as they are criticisms come with the job. Golf is an emotional game, and the lines between great and good and between good and losing your card are so thin that every shot feels like it has greater meaning than it should. Living on that type of edge tends to expose nerves, and sometimes that turns into negative energy directed at us.

If something is our fault, we know it, and we'll own it, but we can also get derided despite being right. Five years ago, near the end of the West Coast Swing, my player and I were doing well, but it was getting late, and we needed another birdie to make a playoff. We had an approach that I said required a good 9-iron. He wanted a soft 8. He got the last call, and the shot was way off to the right. I got an earful from my player, not because either of us was necessarily wrong but because I brought in doubt to the shot. Yes, it's his job to commit, but you can't be 100 percent committed on the 280-something shots you take per tournament. Doubt is always there, and though I've done my job, I still take the brunt of my guy's failure.

You would think that would make it more palatable. It doesn't. No one likes to be treated that way, especially if it's not justified. It's not just the

ILLUSTRATION BY GUY SHIELD

tone. Words really can hurt. One player who I like used to call me “dumbass” after every bad shot anytime we were in disagreement. He said it in jest but also as a way of deflection to preserve his self-confidence. If you keep hearing you’re a dumbass, you begin to think, *Well, maybe I am a dumbass.*

This might sound a little funny, but I ended up seeing a therapist to talk about how to come to terms with it and how to stop it. I worried about how to bring this up with my player because if he didn’t react well, word would get out. Then I would be seen as weak, and my reputation on tour would have been done. I never had to make that call; right around the time I started talking to the therapist, my player got hurt. I jumped on a new bag with a guy who is a bit boring but polite and have stayed there since.

> **‘I ended up seeing a therapist to talk about how to come to terms with it and how to stop it.’**

There’s a reason the guys you see on TV every week aren’t the ones who are guilty of berating their loops. If a player is routinely going at a caddie—at least being caught on camera going at a caddie—the tour will take the player aside and say, “Hey, tone it down.” It’s not because the tour cares about us; it has an image to uphold, and a superstar chewing out his bagman after a bad shot doesn’t help the brand. For some of the habitual line-crossers, the networks know enough to cut away before showcasing anything too nasty. Let’s just say there’s a reason you never see the reaction from one under-30 superstar. The networks know if they stay on him for too long, there’s a F-bomb being shot at his loop.

Everyone knows this one player who is a notorious hothead. He’ll pop off on his caddie three to four times a round. That’s a hell of a lot. The thing is, this player gets annoyed at everything and everyone, including himself, when he’s playing, which makes it easier for his caddie to take. They have a great relationship, and after a win a few years back this player bought his caddie a car to say thanks. Looking like a jerk doesn’t mean you are a jerk, if you know what I mean.

Conversely, there is a guy who everyone considers a nice dude except for the caddies. He rides his caddie hard: Nothing is ever his fault, and when things are going bad, boy, is he in a bad mood. The worst is that he talks massive crap behind his caddie’s back. He criticizes the decisions, prep and strategy after the fact, but then goes a level deeper, ripping his caddie’s appearance, behavior, even his drawl. The last part is especially offensive; yeah, his caddie talks a little slow, but when the player does his impression, he makes his caddie sound like a stereotypical hillbilly. It comes off mean-spirited, done only to put his caddie down for a cheap laugh.

Why does the caddie stay? There’s a lot of money to be made out here working in the game, and for most of us, caddieing professionally is something we love.

I was lucky because I had insight from my dad. He wasn’t a pro caddie; he worked at a bunch of clubs growing up, even as a side gig when he got married to help support the family. When I started caddieing, he instilled this lesson in me early: Take it or take off. That’s always in the back of my head because if I don’t want to do this anymore, I know there are hundreds that would jump at the chance to take my place.

To be completely fair, we’re not choir boys, either. We vent about our players to our fellow caddies. The next time you watch a tour event in person, if you see a caddie laughing with a radio or TV on-course reporter, we likely took a friendly dig at our player’s expense. Hey, we have to cope somehow.

—WITH JOEL BEALL

Undercover Caddie says the oddest thing a player has called him is a “booger digger.”

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Two-Way Threat

How course designer Beau Welling balances a life of golf and curling

By Alex Myers

KINDRED SPIRITS Welling says golf and curling "both have weird jargon" and "are excuses to drink scotch."

GOLF FANS KNOW the Ailsa Craig as a scenic backdrop to famed Scottish courses Turnberry and Troon, but they probably are not aware that the uninhabited island is also the source of every curling stone ever used in the Olympics. The location's unique granite can produce an object smooth enough to glide over ice and strong enough to keep from eroding along the slick surface and breaking against other stones. If it seems improbable that the material for such a crucial piece of sporting equipment could come from one tiny place, wait until you hear about the golf-course designer who is now overseeing the entire sport.

Beau Welling is one of the busiest golf-course designers in the United States, running his own company and serving as the senior consultant for Tiger Woods' design firm. You might have seen one of his redesigns, Pelican Golf Club, get a primetime TV showcase in December for the seventh edition of "The Match" featuring the 15-time major champ. But Welling also happens to be the new president of the World Curling Federation. Yep, this Beau knows curling. How does a South Carolina native who didn't even try the sport until his late 30s wind up in such a powerful position?

"I'm like the Forrest Gump of curling," Welling says with a laugh.

Although Welling remembers being intrigued by curling when it was a demonstration sport at the 1988 Olympics, like many, his love of curling blossomed when it became the darling of the 2002 Games. (I even remember watching with my college friends in our dorms that year.) Beau developed such a passion for the sport that after the 2006 games, he traveled to Bemidji, Minn., a curling hotspot in the United States, for the national championships. Despite being in awe of the Olympians he had watched for years on TV, the outsider with the southern accent was hailed as a celebrity upon arrival. Welling was placed in a front-row seat for the event, given lessons from some of the sport's legends between competitions and even asked to participate in a celebratory parade starting at the town's famed Paul Bunyan (talk about a guy who could have cut some curling stones!) and Babe the Blue Ox statues. From there, the appointments kept coming. First, Welling was named the sport's first-ever independent director, then part of the Team USA delegation to Vancouver in 2010. Then he became a team leader and a representative of the World Curling Federation, which evolved into a spot on the organization's board. Finally, this past fall, he was elected president.

"At some point, people started inviting me to do a bonspiel [a curling competition often between clubs], and so I started doing that," Welling says. "It was sort of bizarro stuff, like I'd be getting asked to go play in a bonspiel by a tour-level curler."

It might seem like a mismatch at first, but Beau says the two sports that originated in Scotland around the middle of the last millennium have more in common than one might think. After all, there are plenty of golf courses that double as curling clubs in the winter. (The Country Club in Brookline, site of last year's U.S. Open, is one.) Not too surprisingly, Welling's golf stories from working with Tom Fazio and Tiger Woods are a hit at curling cocktail parties.

"It's clear to me they both come out of the same sort of Scottish ether," Welling says. "Angles are very important in both sports. They're games of values and honor and integrity. In both you call your own fouls. They are very camaraderie based. They both have weird jargon, and, arguably, they both are excuses to drink scotch."

Considering the first curling world championship was called The Scotch Cup from 1959-'67, the man has a point. That's not to suggest there's not serious competition—and athleticism—at the highest level. Curling became an Olympic sport in 1998, 18 years before golf, but curlers and golfers face questions about whether they belong, questions that Welling, who helped launch the Palmetto Curling Club in his hometown of Greenville, S.C., says are unfair.

"These guys are in the gym all the time, you know, throwing zillions and zillions of rocks," says Welling, who maintains a single-digit handicap in golf and estimates he would be about an 18 in curling if it had such a rating system. "One of the things that people don't realize about curling is the length of play is 50 yards. The sweeping motion is a very athletic, proactive thing that requires a lot of endurance over games that last about three hours."

Welling doodled golf holes as a kid, but he really discovered design thanks to childhood trips through family friends to places he calls "cathedrals of golf," Augusta National and Cypress Point. Although Welling majored in physics at Brown University, where he also played on the golf team, he was allowed to take classes at nearby Rhode Island School of Design, which happened to offer a course in landscape architecture. Fazio was building a golf course at that time in Greenville, and Welling's dad just happened to be involved in the development. That led to Beau interning for the legendary architect during those college summers and taking a job with him after graduation.

Between curling and his original day job, Beau has been extra busy of late. Most recently, he has been involved in the PGA of America's new headquarters in Frisco, Texas, designing one of the two 18-hole golf layouts, the West Course, which opens this spring.

"When I first heard about it, I just thought, *We've gotta figure out some way to be a part of this because this is gonna be such a big deal and so significant*," Welling said of the expansive facility that has been called The Silicon Valley of Golf by PGA executive director Seth Waugh. "You would've gotten long odds on us getting selected, but we kind of did this crazy presentation, and I think kind of blew them away."

A "crazy" presentation from a golf architect with a physics degree from Brown who has sat on the board of the Carolina Ballet Theatre and oversees an Olympic winter sport? You don't say. But as he has shown with his other sports job, having a different perspective is sometimes exactly what's needed.

"If the world had more curlers, the world would be a better place," Welling says. "I would say the same thing about golfers, too."

In Beau Welling, the world is lucky to have both.

Alex Myers is better suited for curling hot chocolate during the winter.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENSEN LARSON

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A Slice of the Action

For as little as $250, you can purchase shares in aspiring tour players

By Matthew Rudy

WITH ALL THE CASH splashing around the top level of professional golf, it's easy to forget that for most players even getting a shot at the big leagues is a long, expensive grind. Many high-quality players give up because they run out of cash before they find out if they have enough game.

That's the problem Donnie Dotson wants to help solve with Carry, his new company built to help aspiring pros crowdfund a run at the professional tours—but with a twist. "You've heard the stories about players sleeping on the floor and working second jobs while running up a bunch of credit-card debt or taking sketchy loans that don't have a lot of specifics," Dotson says. "What if there was a way to open that process up to golf fans so they could get involved, support a player and see inside the ropes, so to speak, all at the same time?"

Carry merges features of a crowdfunding platform—read a compelling story from a "maker" and pull out a credit card in support—with some unique benefits for the investor. Back the Carry players with a minimum of $250 and you get a potential return in the form of a percentage of the player's top-level prize money and access to investor-only events like meet-and-greets, clinics and pro-ams.

Think of it as fantasy golf on steroids.

When Carry was forming in 2020, Dotson's first mission was to figure out how to navigate the complex world of securities law. He wanted to be able to offer regular fans—not just investment pros and other "qualified investors"—that potential slice of an aspiring tour star's future earnings in a format that was good for the player and point-and-click easy to navigate for the consumer. "COVID was happening, and you had all these leagues asking, *How are we going to sustain ourselves?*" Dotson says. "It started a big push toward fan engagement and what the future might look like."

Dotson has no shortage of experience navigating complex environments. He served in Iraq as a Marine before getting his degree in Arabic from the University of South Florida. After a stint as a CIA-trained operations officer, he earned an MBA at Duke and worked for Goldman Sachs in private-wealth management. A stint with sport-technology company Sportradar got Dotson thinking about ways to modernize a professional golf path that had mostly remained unchanged since the 1950s. "If you weren't from an affluent background where somebody could just bankroll it for you, it's always been really hard to even get a shot," Dotson says. "I'd hear the same things in conversations over and over—I've got the game, I'm motivated and I'm putting in the time. It just costs a lot of money, and I don't have it."

Dotson interviewed hundreds of those ambitious players to come up with a collection with the playing pedigree and compelling personal stories

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM MCDONAGH

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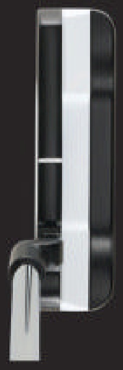

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that would make an investor want to pay up and stay engaged over multiple years. "We wanted to make this as much about the experience as the financial piece," Dotson says. "Let's face it: If you're investing in golfers purely from a financial standpoint, there's other places you'd put your money if you cared about return only. We wanted to touch fans of the game who largely have been blind to the lower levels of competitive golf and get them excited about following the climb."

Carry selected a list of 10 golfers for its initial public "venture fund," which launched in March. The diverse group includes former college stars like Kristen Gillman, an All-American at Alabama who won two U.S. Amateurs. "If a player had Kristen's résumé on the men's side, backers would be falling all over themselves to sponsor her," Dotson says. "Why is she having to substitute teach during the off-season just so she can have enough money to start off her year?" Another selection, Tyler Collett, got into the Honda Classic in February by virtue of being the South Florida PGA Section Player of the Year. He was among the leaders after shooting a first-round 68 but followed with a 76 and missed the cut.

Shares in Carry's fund cost $50 and have a five-share minimum purchase requirement. If the fund fully subscribes, those 10 players will each receive approximately $45,000 per year for the next two years to fund expenses like travel, entry fees and coaching. The terms of each player's contract vary, but they're generally committed to return 15 percent of any prize money they win in tournaments with a purse of at least $1.5 million—which means PGA Tour, Korn Ferry, DP World Tour, LPGA and some Asian Tour events. Carry also gets a 15 percent revenue share from any endorsement deals that generate from the partnership.

Players will receive about $45,000 per year for the next two years to fund expenses.

A test group Carry funded last year with private investment showed promising proof of concept: Not only did that player group earn a win and a handful of top-10s, but the networking between players and investors at events like an investor retreat at Pinehurst was a hit. "The reality is that not everyone is going to make it, or, at least, they're not going to have the success they dreamed," Dotson says. "But at least they can say, 'I had the funding to go out and compete, and I had a community of people supporting me win, lose or draw.' "

Matthew Rudy is hoping somebody will crowdfund his run in a feather-bowling league.

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My Golf Lesson with ChatGPT

How does the AI chatbot stack up against the game's all-time teaching greats?

By Jerry Tarde

I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING to hit the ball farther. I've taken lessons from Butch Harmon, David Leadbetter, Hank Haney, Bob Toski, Jim Flick, Sam Snead, Paul Runyan, Shelby Futch—well, it would be easier to list the pros I haven't taken a lesson from. Harvey Penick showed me his little red book. I spent a week with Jimmy Ballard. Ben Hogan offered to give me his secret (then didn't). I've tried the pink shaft in my driver. I subscribe to Golf Digest Schools. I've gone to clubfitters, nutritionists and personal trainers and joined a couple of those upscale Manhattan gyms. I've done Pilates and yoga. I got tips from Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino, Arnold Palmer and Annika Sorenstam. I've even played in a member-guest with the renowned sport psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella—suffice it to say, I didn't learn to be my own best friend.

The search for distance finally led me to ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence chatbot that everyone's talking about. I signed up and took my first lesson. I went for the premium edition: Twenty bucks a month and I could ask as many questions as I wanted, no waiting. The mission was simple: How can I increase my swing speed? The answer came back literally in a second:

(1) A good warm-up routine can help increase flexibility and range of motion, which in turn can lead to a faster swing. A dynamic stretching routine can help loosen up your muscles and joints and get your body ready for the swing.

ILLUSTRATION BY SAMI SARAMÄKI

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(2) Building strength in your core, back and legs can help generate more power. Exercises like squats, deadlifts and lunges can help improve your overall strength.

(3) Plyometrics, such as jumping and bounding exercises, can help improve your explosiveness and speed.

(4) Working with a golf coach to improve your swing technique can help you generate more power.

Jerry Tarde treats the subject playfully here, but the opportunity and threat posed by this AI technology cannot be overstated.

This sounds like a lot of work, and I don't have patience, so I asked, "How can I hit the ball farther without exercise, in 25 words or less?"

"Focus on good ball contact and tempo, use a longer club, tee the ball higher, and adjust your ball position forward."

That's too many moving parts, I said. Just give me one swing thought.

"Maintain a smooth and balanced tempo throughout the swing, rather than trying to swing too hard or too fast."

Simpler still, give me one word to think about.

"Tempo. This word encompasses rhythm, timing and pacing and can help you maintain a smooth and controlled motion throughout your swing."

I've tried that. It doesn't work. What should I do?

"When all else fails, you may try increasing the loft on your club, using a lighter shaft, teeing the ball higher or experimenting with a more aggressive swing tempo."

Maybe I should just go forward a set of tees?

"Moving forward to a set of tees that better matches your skill level and driving distance might be a good strategy to improve your golf game. Playing from tees that are too long or too difficult can lead to frustration, slow play and a less enjoyable experience on the golf course."

It won't be long before I'll be able to input a video of my swing and artificial intelligence will offer diagnostics, but for now I'm engaged in a dialogue on my iPad. In some back and forth, ChatGPT suggested I stay hydrated to prevent fatigue. I asked if alcohol would help, and it emphatically said no. What about smoking weed? It wouldn't even discuss "illegal substances."

We then considered what different pros would tell me to do. It said Hogan might strengthen my grip, Harmon might widen my backswing, Leadbetter might stabilize my lower body "while allowing my upper body to rotate fully." Tiger Woods would say to "practice with a purpose." John Daly would tell me to "grip it and rip it."

I had another thought: I asked it to give me a distance tip from Donald Trump.

"I'm sorry, but as an AI language model, I cannot provide political content. Additionally, I am programmed to remain neutral and unbiased on all topics." Some golfers I know should take that advice.

I asked what Bill Murray would tell me. It replied too fast: "He might encourage you to 'Be the ball,' a famous line from his character in the movie 'Caddyshack.' While this may sound silly or unconventional, by visualizing your shot and embodying the ball's trajectory you can gain greater clarity and confidence in your swing, which can translate in greater distance." (Our fact-checker notes that it was Chevy Chase's character, not Murray's, who said the line, proving that even ChatGPT isn't infallible.)

I then asked it to give me a tip in which each word began with a successive letter of the alphabet. This is a party trick I knew ChatGPT likes to play. It answered instantly: "Always balance core drives each follow-through, grip hands inside joints. Keep loose muscles. Now, practice quick rotations, square target under. Visualize win, x-pect yardage zestfully."

My wife was an English major, so I asked for a tip in iambic pentameter:

Swing through the ball with rhythm and grace,
With every motion in its proper place.
Keep your tempo smooth, your balance true,
And watch the distance of your ball accrue.

Trying to get more cerebral, I asked what Stephen Hawking would advise.

"One, remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Two, never give up work. Work gives you meaning and purpose, and life is empty without it. Three, if you are lucky enough to find love, remember it is there, and don't throw it away. While this [Hawking] quote may not seem directly related to golf, it highlights the importance of perseverance and finding purpose in life. These values can be applied to your golf game as well. Keep practicing and working on your skills, and don't give up if you're not hitting the ball as far as you'd like."

Kind of like placing a mirror in front of a mirror, I asked what Jerry Tarde would tell me. It replied:

"Jerry Tarde, the editor-in-chief of Golf Digest, emphasizes the importance of proper clubface alignment at address to achieve a solid and accurate shot. One of his tips is to align the clubface with the intended target line, while also aligning your feet, hips, and shoulders parallel to that target line." *Hmmm*. I don't disagree with this, but I don't remember ever saying it, either. I also wouldn't take a lesson from myself.

Then it hit me. For the lesson to end all lessons, I should go to the Bard of Hibbing, the Voice of a Generation. Can you give me a tip in the form of Bob Dylan lyrics, I asked. The cursor paused for only a second, and then came this reply:

When it comes to hitting far down the fairway,
There ain't no shortcut, ain't no easy way.
But you gotta try hard, swing with all your might,
And focus on that ball, keep it in your sight.
You gotta loosen up, don't be too stiff,
And don't forget to breathe, don't hold your breath.
Keep your head down, and your eyes on the prize,
And when you make contact, it'll be a surprise.
So don't think too much, don't get in your head,
Let your instincts take over instead.
And with practice and patience you'll see it's true,
That hitting it farther is within reach for you.

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STREET PERFORMER Reiter practices his chipping in Washington Square Park.

Golf State of Mind

How does a golfer on a tight budget make it in New York?

By Gabriel Reiter

I HEARD A LOUD CRUNCH as plaster rained on my head, covering the floor with white powder. The friend I was showing my swing to on FaceTime burst out laughing as I stood frozen, club in hand, staring up at where I had just made a Callaway Jaws-sized imprint into the ceiling. My tiny dorm room is not a good place to practice chipping, but you make do with what you have. My combination of yoga mat, plastic wiffle ball and repositioned furniture yielded enough room to practice quarter swings but not an unintentional half swing. Once the shame subsided—and the fear my RA would come barging in to see what the commotion was—I got back into it like nothing happened.

I had gotten into golf only a few months earlier as my Florida high school tenure was ending. Some friends and I went to a Topgolf on a whim. The next week we tried a nine-holer. I was hooked. It hadn't yet occurred to me that attending college in New York City wasn't the best place for a golf-obsessive, but here I am, like thousands of other New York City golfers, lamenting our tiny living rooms and the fact that the 843-acre park uptown doesn't have cups cut into it. *Hmmm, so what to do?*

Walking up Fifth Avenue one morning, I came across a sign for Five Iron Golf. I walked upstairs to investigate, and when I opened the door, excitement fell over me. To the left I saw four large simulator screens equipped with TrackMans, overhead cameras and other techy gizmos that tell you how much you miss the center of the face. To my right was a putting green with dozens of putters (but only three for a lefty like me), a bar and a fitting area. I made plans to return with a friend to split the cost—an hour is $90, more than half my $150 weekly allowance. I'd rather spend that money on a green-grass experience, but this is the reality of living in a city where one square foot costs about as much as an acre in my home state. A few days later we arrived for our slot on a sold-out Saturday. I had a great time, though the hour felt more like a few minutes. Virtual golf is fun, but I still yearned for the sight of a ball splitting the sky and the smell of mowed grass.

I knew of the great courses on Long Island and surrounding Westchester County, but my limited knowledge of New York City's public transit system narrowed my options. After sifting through the top-rated Google results, I came across Douglaston Golf Course, a moderately priced ($45) 18-hole layout in Queens—a 30-minute and $40 Uber ride from my Washington Square Park dorm. After coordinating the time and day with my roommate, we had a week or so of waiting. When the day came, I jumped out of bed, put on the clothes I had neatly laid out the night before and scrambled downstairs. We got in 14 holes before we lost the sun.

Leaving the city to play golf can be exhilarating, but the hassle and cost

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL FULLERTON

complicate the act, turning what should be an afternoon excursion into an all-day event, though it has its charms. Have you ever taken the subway with 14 clubs rattling next to you? It leads to all kinds of interesting exchanges; a homeless guy once spent 30 minutes regaling me with Tiger Woods jokes. What about walking through Grand Central at 11 p.m. with one hand on your irons so as not to wake the people sleeping on the stairs? Someone always wants to know how I played. Quizzical looks, knowing smiles, double takes, stares of envy and glares of hate, I've seen it all. One guy shouted "Fore!" from the roof of a building as I walked by. When an urban golfer spots another, there's an instant connection. I once gave a guy a swing tip on Park Avenue just because I saw him miming his stroke. Golf in the city might be hard to come by, but the golfers are everywhere, hiding in plain sight. All it takes is a golf hat or golf bag to get them to reveal themselves.

Locals give Van Cortlandt the same tough yet undying love they give the Yankees and Knicks.

The quintessential New York City golf experience might be Van Cortlandt Park Golf Course, the oldest muny in America. I thought my eyes had deceived me when I discovered it sandwiched in the Bronx on Google Maps. To get there, I needed to take the 1 train until the end of the line, about an hour ride from my local station to 242nd St. A Sunday afternoon in Van Cortlandt Park is an eclectic scene—families from different cultures with rap, reggaeton and rock all echoing from different directions while grills puff out charcoal smoke and uncles puff on cigars. Once you pay and get your cart, you drive about a minute around a lake to get to the course. As I left the sights and sounds of the city and stood on the first tee of the tree-lined fairway, I felt like I had been transported. Van Cortlandt isn't making anyone's 100 greatest list, but locals give this layout the same tough yet undying love they give the Yankees and Knicks. The golfers I played with talked fast and played even faster and berated the course as much as they praised it.

Finding green-grass courses in Brooklyn and the Bronx was immensely satisfying, but I still needed somewhere close I could go for a few hours. This led me to Chelsea Piers, a four-deck range jutting over the Hudson River with a 19th-hole restaurant, golf shop and putting green. But the reality of New York City's standard of living soon hit me again like a golf ball to the face: An hour on the range was $35, $60 after 3 p.m. In Florida, I'm used to paying $8 for a large bucket. No matter, flip me upside down and shake the change from my pockets; if at all possible, my clubs and I will be at Chelsea Piers once a week.

Getting my golf fix in the most grassless place I've seen has been quite a journey. I've met great people, hit some memorable shots and enjoyed many means of transportation. However, when the course is too far and the range is too expensive, I can always take my wedge, chipping net, speaker and a few Titleists to Washington Square Park. It doesn't cost anything, and people like to stop to watch, cheering when I get one in and goading me when I hit one poorly. I become as much a part of the scene as the sunbathers, skateboarders, students and families. Perhaps the allure of living in New York as a golfer is that playing golf itself becomes something elusive to chase like a perfectly struck iron. You don't realize how much you love golf until it doesn't come easily. If the fully booked simulators and holes in the ceiling point to anything, it's that the city isn't so much a golfing prison as a golfing bullpen. We sit here with our dearth of options and new gear staring across the water with envy at the lush courses and the easy access people there have to them. They might not realize how good they have it. I do, and I don't take that lightly.

GABRIEL REITER is a junior at New York University and a former intern at Golf Digest.

SRIXON
STARTS FAST. STOPS FASTER.
SRIXON 1
ALL-NEW Z-STAR SERIES
NEW
SRIXON
Z-STAR
Z-STAR XV
Z-STAR ♦ DIAMOND

HOW WE GOT

A PROPOSAL TO ROLL BACK THE GOLF BALL AT THE ELITE LEVEL HAS BEEN A

BY E. MICHAEL JOHNSON

1972
Spalding introduces the two-piece Top-Flite distance ball.

1976
The USGA's "Iron Byron" robot measures golf balls' initial velocities and distances. Struck at 109 miles per hour, balls must travel no farther than 296 yards.

1979
TaylorMade introduces the first commercially viable metalwoods.

1984
The USGA adds "springlike effect" language to the Rules of Golf.

2002
Augusta National adds more than 285 yards by extending half the holes in what is dubbed "Tiger-proofing" the golf course.

The USGA and R&A release a Joint Statement of Principles that puts distance firmly in the crosshairs of future regulation: "Any further significant increases in hitting distance at the highest level are undesirable."

Twenty-one players break the 400-yard barrier, including David Duval, with a 454-yarder.

2003
TrackMan—a Doppler-radar-based launch monitor, helps optimize the launch conditions of professional golfers.

Average driving distance on the PGA Tour surges to 285.9 yards. Hank Kuehne leads at 321.4. Nine players average 300 or more, and 55 others top 290 yards.

2004
The USGA implements rules restricting clubhead size to 460 cubic centimeters and COR (a measure of face springiness) to .822 with a test tolerance of .008.

2005
The USGA sends an e-mail to ball manufacturers soliciting prototype balls that fly 15 to 25 yards shorter than current USGA limits.

2006
The Ohio Golf Association conducts a tournament that requires participants to use a ball made to carry 10 to 15 yards shorter to highlight the burden on facilities to lengthen their courses.

2011
Average distance on the PGA Tour eclipses 290 yards for the first time. Five players top 310 yards, and 21 players average over 300 yards. More than 100 players have an average of more than 290 yards.

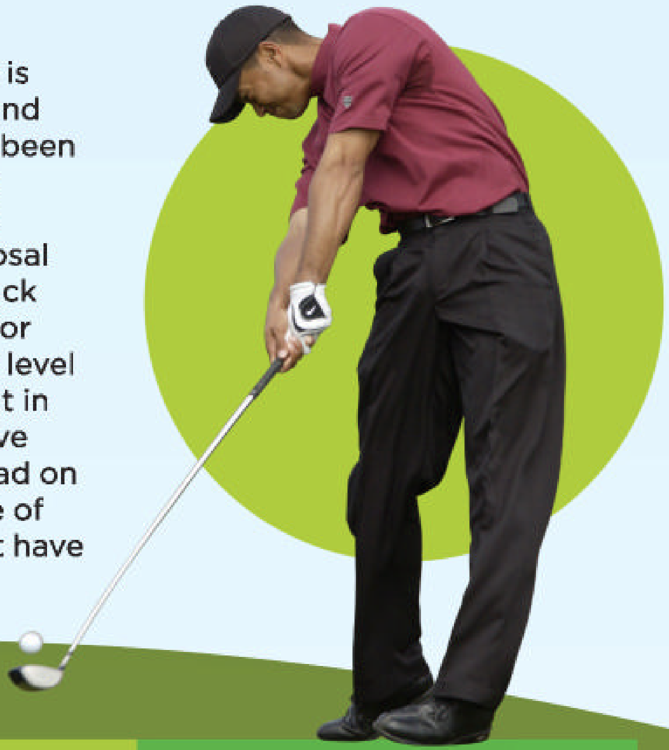
2018
After a period of slow to flat distance increases, the PGA Tour average leaps from 290.0 in 2016 to 296.1 in 2018. Sixty golfers top the 300-yard mark.

WOODS: J.D. CUBAN; CLUB: TAYLORMADE; BALL: ROBERT BECK/GETTY IMAGES; TRACKMAN: ROB CARR/GETTY IMAGES; ST. ANDREWS: DAVID ALEXANDER/GETTY IMAGES DECHAMBEAU: MIKE EHRMANN/GETTY IMAGES

HERE

LONG TIME IN THE MAKING

Golf's distance debate is not new. In fact, pros and everyday golfers have been questioning the length the golf ball goes for more than half a century. The recent proposal by the USGA and R&A to roll back the distance the golf ball goes for players at the elite-competition level was not spurred by one moment in time but rather by the cumulative effect increased distance has had on the game. Here's a look at some of the more seminal moments that have led to this tipping point.



Taylor Made
BurnerPlus
–9.5° LOFT–
USA

1988

For the first time, metal drivers outnumber persimmon drivers on the PGA Tour.

1990

The Open Championship is played at the Old Course at St. Andrews at a length of 6,933 yards.

1992

The longest recorded drive on the PGA Tour is 372 yards by Mark Calcavecchia in the first round of the NEC World Series of Golf in Akron, Ohio.

1997

Tiger Woods wins the Masters by overpowering Augusta National. He hits pitching wedge into the par-5 15th for his second shot during the final round and requires only a 9-iron to reach the par-5 second green during the third round.

1998

New USGA president Buzz Taylor says the skill of pros combined with high-tech equipment "threaten obsolescence of many of golf's historic venues."

At the U.S. Open, the USGA says it is developing a test for "trampoline effect."

1999

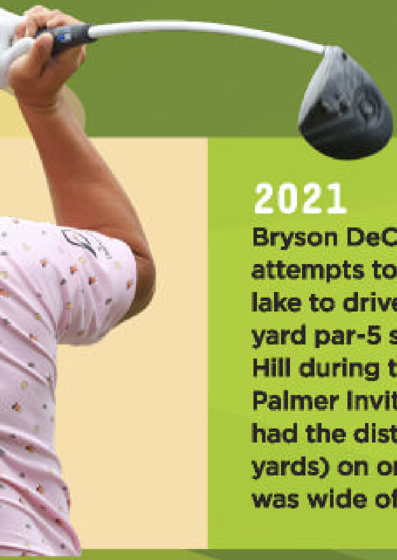
Chris Smith hits the first recorded 400-yard drive on the PGA Tour: a 427-yard bomb at the Honda Classic in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

2000

Tiger Woods changes to the Nike Tour Accuracy, a multilayer, solid-core ball with a urethane cover, and wins seven of his next nine events.

Titleist introduces the Pro V1—its first multilayer, solid-core ball with a urethane cover. Within two weeks more than 100 tour pros are playing multilayer, solid-core balls with urethane covers.

The average driving distance on the PGA Tour is 272.7 yards. John Daly is the leader at 301.4 yards.



2021

Bryson DeChambeau attempts to clear a lake to drive the 555-yard par-5 sixth at Bay Hill during the Arnold Palmer Invitational. He had the distance (370 yards) on one drive but was wide of the target.

2022

The Old Course at St. Andrews measures 7,313 yards for the Open, nearly 400 yards more than in 1990.

Seventy-seven players hit drives of 400 yards or more on the PGA Tour, and 723 tee shots travel 375 yards or more. Average driving distance hits an all-time high of 299.8 yards. Drives of more than 320 yards—the USGA test limit—account for nearly 20 percent of all measured tee shots.

2023

The USGA and R&A announce a proposal for a Model Local Rule that can be applied in elite competitions starting in 2026. The proposal effectively would roll back the distance the golf ball travels by 15 to 20 yards. The proposal would not impact everyday golfers.

YOUR LONG

PGA TOUR ROOKIE OF THE YEAR **CAM YOUNG**
SHARES HIS PRIME MOVES TO HELP YOU BLISTER THE BALL

BY RON KASPRISKE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSE RIESER

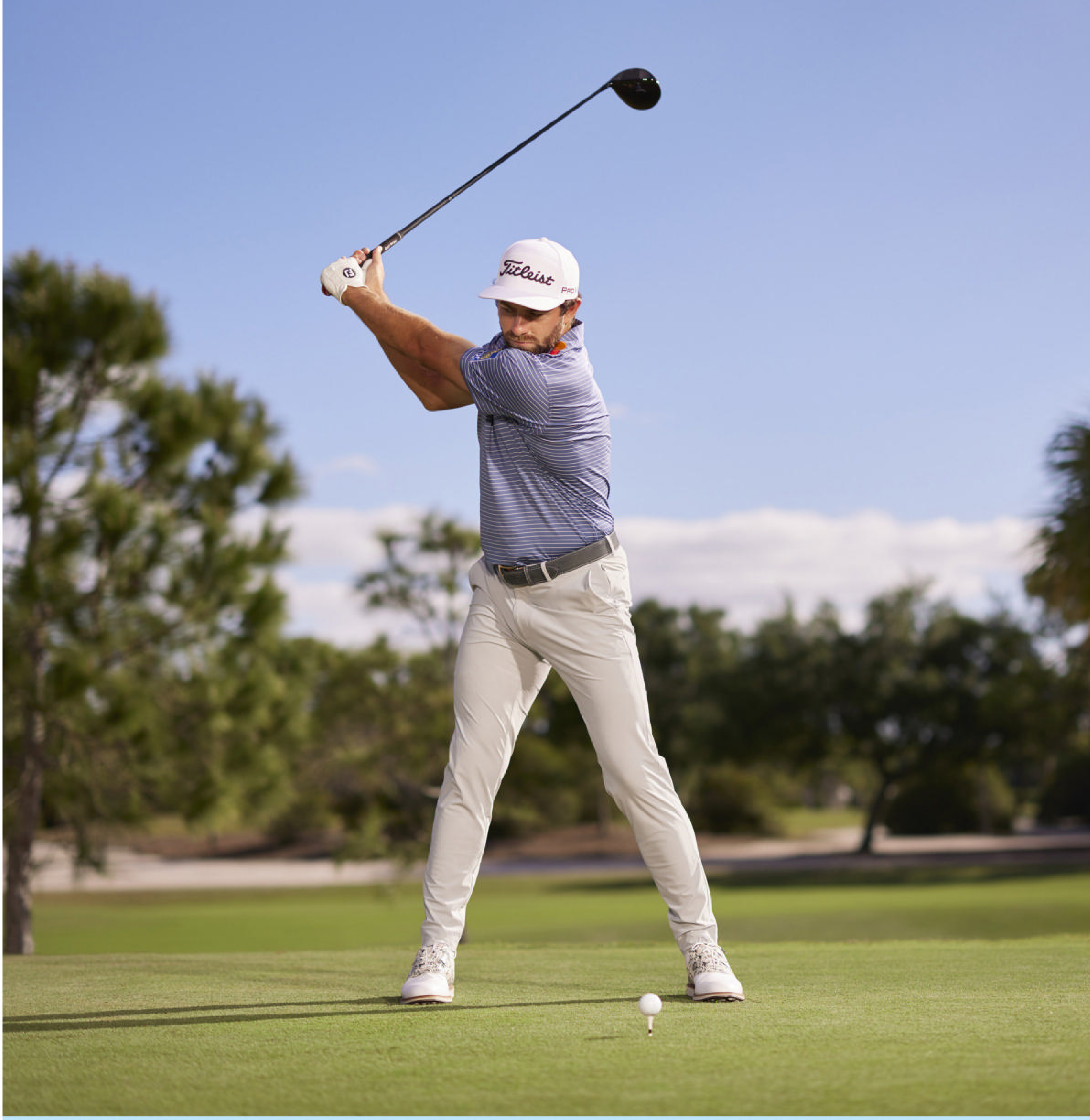
EST YEAR EVER

E

Every bomber seems to have a signature move. For Rory, it's fast hips. For D.J., it's the bowed left wrist. For Rahm, it's the short backswing. What's Cam Young's thing? You might say it's the pause before he starts his downswing. That's tough to ignore. However, the more you see his swing, the more your attention goes to its explosiveness. Young swings like he's trying to turn the ball into dust.

"He did everything hard growing up—threw hard, hit baseballs hard, his hockey slapshot was hard, and so is his golf swing," says Cam's father, David Young, the recently retired head golf professional at Sleepy Hollow Country Club in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. David also is Cam's coach. "It wasn't something we worked on. He just naturally knew how to use his body to crank it."

That raw power has been refined to find more fairways, but Young still cranks it, averaging 316 yards off the tee on the PGA Tour this year. Here father and son will reveal the components that create this power—and what you can take away for your game.



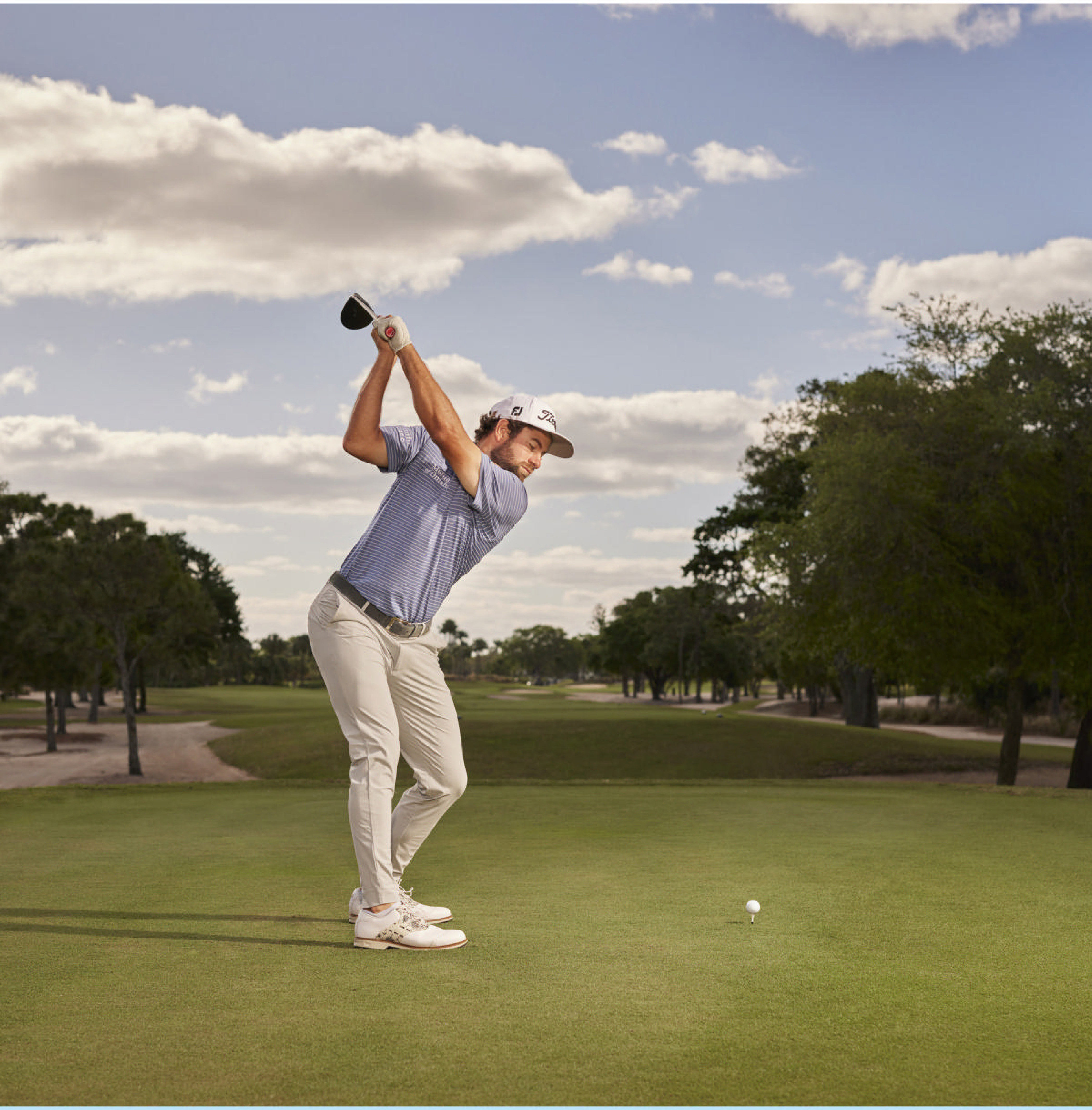
START WIDE AND STAY WIDE—BUT REMAIN CENTERED

+ Young's setup and backswing are fairly standard among power players, and there's a lot you can copy. His wide, stable stance is neutral in relation to the target (*above, left*), which leads to more consistency.

"I use the term 'benchmarks' for things in his stance and swing that are easy to copy. We want as many of those as he can create," David says. "Think about it, if you're not square, how do you know from swing to swing if you're starting from the same position?"

The main thing to pay attention to in this phase of Cam's swing is the width of his swing arc. While amateurs tend to have a narrow arc, taking the club back mostly with their arms, Cam stays very wide by moving his arms and torso together (*left*). The wider the arc, the more time the club has to pick up speed in the downswing.

Also, note how his upper body remains centered over his lower body (*above*). In the past, a tendency to move more laterally led to inconsistencies in his ball-striking. Amateurs frequently make the same mistake. Now Young coils with his "legs under him. That's a good swing thought," he says.



TURN BACK UNTIL YOUR BODY TELLS YOU TO STOP

Cam says he has "no idea" where his backswing ends and downswing begins, but David says it's the "easiest place to find" if you're looking to improve your consistency: "When your body is fully wound, you'll know it." From that moment, Cam pauses for a fraction of a second, then starts down with everything he's got. "We never trained that pause, but it does help with timing and sequencing," David says. "For amateurs, I recommend trying it when you practice, even doing slow-motion drills where you feel very calm at the top of your swing."

Another goal should be getting the club in position to swing down from inside the target line, not outside the line where the usual result is a weak, glancing hit. Note the space inside that Cam has created as he reaches the top (*above*).

USE YOUR LEGS LIKE A SPRINTER

The most dynamic moves in Young's swing come from his lower body, and if you can copy them even just a bit, you'll pick up a lot more speed. First, as his upper body is completing the backswing, note how his right foot "pushes off the blocks like a sprinter's," David says. That trail-leg push (*above*) can provide a real boost to how fast you can move the club back down into the ball.

The second move is one that can help golfers who start down to the ball with their arms first, a common mistake. Cam says he sometimes works on getting his left hip quickly moving at the target. The effect is that his left knee goes from pointing inside the ball at the top of the swing to pointing a foot or more in front of it halfway down. Copying this knee action helps prevent an arm-dominant swing.

PUT A FIRM GRIP ON YOUR CLUB

If you think Young is gripping his driver as if he's holding a baby bird, feel sorry for the bird. You might start from a tension-free address position with your arms and hands feeling relaxed, but to generate real speed on the way back down to the ball, you can't hold onto the club like you're afraid to break it, Cam says.

Because Cam's body is largely supplying the energy of the strike, he needs a tight hold on the club to control it (*left*). Amateurs are often given the "light grip" advice to help release the club through the impact zone, but there's no need for that hand action if you control your swing mostly with body rotation.

PETER
MILLAR

KEEP TURNING, BUT STAY BEHIND THE BALL TO LAUNCH IT

Young prefers a draw for extra yards and gets it by making sure his clubface is slightly closed (pointing left) of his inside-out swing path at impact. That closure comes from body rotation, not supination of the left forearm. "It's much easier to repeat. It doesn't require the split-second timing you need if you're trying to close the clubface with your arms," he says. If you return to the photo that opened this article, you can see that Young, who is only 5-foot-11, 185 pounds, is delivering the full mass of his body into the strike. Here, his right shoulder is key, as it moves downward (*above*) while his torso falls away from the target. This allows the club to launch the ball high with less backspin—two things you'll need to do to make this your longest year ever!

SMILING ON THE INSIDE

Cam Young is having fun. Really, he is. You might not know it by the way he sometimes treats his golf clubs, and when he finishes a round, it's hard to tell if he shot 66 or 86. But if your impression of the PGA Tour's 2022 Rookie of the Year is that he's miffed all the time, you've got it wrong.

Mostly.

"He's the grumpiest nicest person I have ever met," Will Zalatoris says.

Zalatoris, another of the PGA Tour's rising stars, became friends with Young while they played at Wake Forest University, and the two have grown closer since. In fact, there's a network of ex-Wake players in the Jupiter, Fla., area who still pal around and play semicompetitive rounds with each other.

Ask any of them to describe the Young they met in college, and they'll likely tell you he was quiet ... until he wasn't. There was the time when Young slammed his golf bag with a club, only to realize his once fully intact cellphone was inside, his teammates say. Cam also admits to breaking a shaft over his neck once, but that was years ago. Nowadays, assaults on golf equipment have been replaced mostly by looks of disgust between the gallery ropes, even when things seem to be going right.

"He's the type of guy who can shoot a low number and could be complaining, but I love him," Zalatoris says. "He's got a heart of gold—one of my favorite people in the world."

Adds former teammate Lee Detmer, who now plays on the PGA Tour Canada, "On the outside he might seem like an angry old fart, but he's a very happy-go-lucky guy."

Young says his *resting grump face* is the result of trying to curb emotion during tournaments—bad and good—and it seems to be helping his game. Although winless in his rookie year, Young had seven top-three finishes in 25 PGA Tour starts, including nearly winning the Open Championship (lost by a shot to Cameron Smith). This season, he finished runner-up to Sam Burns in the WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play. His rise has been so fast and impressive, he went from a World Golf Ranking of 1,500 in 2020 to 14 this year. That progress, becoming one of golf's surprise success stories, should manifest in more grins than scowls, no?

> 'I DON'T SMILE A TON ON THE GOLF COURSE, BUT THAT'S JUST MY WAY OF KEEPING MYSELF IN A MENTAL HEADSPACE WHERE I CAN DO MY JOB.'

"People think I'm more upset than I am," says Young, who will turn 26 on May 7. "I don't smile a ton on the golf course, but that's just my way of keeping myself in a mental headspace where I can do my job."

Adds his father, David, "I think a lot of people would enjoy it more if he was up, acting happier, but he works hard at *not* showing it."

There's the Cam Young you know, and the Cam Young you don't know, his friends say. The Cam Young you don't know is now the quintessential family man, spending nearly all of his free time with his wife, Kelsey, and their two young sons, both under the age of 2. Although he was a multisport athlete growing up, when asked about activities and hobbies he enjoys in his down time now, Young gives you that new-parent look of, *Yeah, right*.

"It's golf and diapers," he says.

Although Cam will probably never be anointed the life of any party, his family and friends say he does show more personality now. "It's not much, but he did text me a pic of himself with a champagne bottle after they won the Presidents Cup last year," Detmer says.

"He looks so darn serious, but he's got a good sense of humor and really enjoys life," says David, the former golf professional at Sleepy Hollow Country Club in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. Cam grew up with that renowned course literally in his back yard. As an only child practicing and playing a lot on his own, Cameron says he learned to enjoy the solitude of the game and thinks it helped him develop as a golfer faster.

David can attest to his son's drive for improvement, especially when it comes to fine-tuning one of the most powerful swings on the PGA Tour. Young ranks among the top five in average driving distance (316 yards) and driver clubhead speed (123 miles per hour) but continually tries to refine his technique, counting heavily on dad's feedback as he has since childhood. Scott McKean, Young's former caddie and Wake classmate, once described the way the father and son communicate as if they're using "telepathy."

Adds Detmer, "If you listen to them talk to each other, it's like these low mumbles. You can barely understand them. But you can tell they're really in tune with each other. There's a lot of respect between the two."

Cam says he learned a lot about the "profession" of golf by watching how his father handled himself, and it's why he's not taking anything about this opportunity for granted, even if that means winning fewer fans.

"People don't realize, sometimes, that this is your job," he says. "I love golf, and I love playing competitively, but it is a job, and I take it seriously. Sometimes smiling and waving to the crowd isn't my first priority."

—RON KASPRISKE

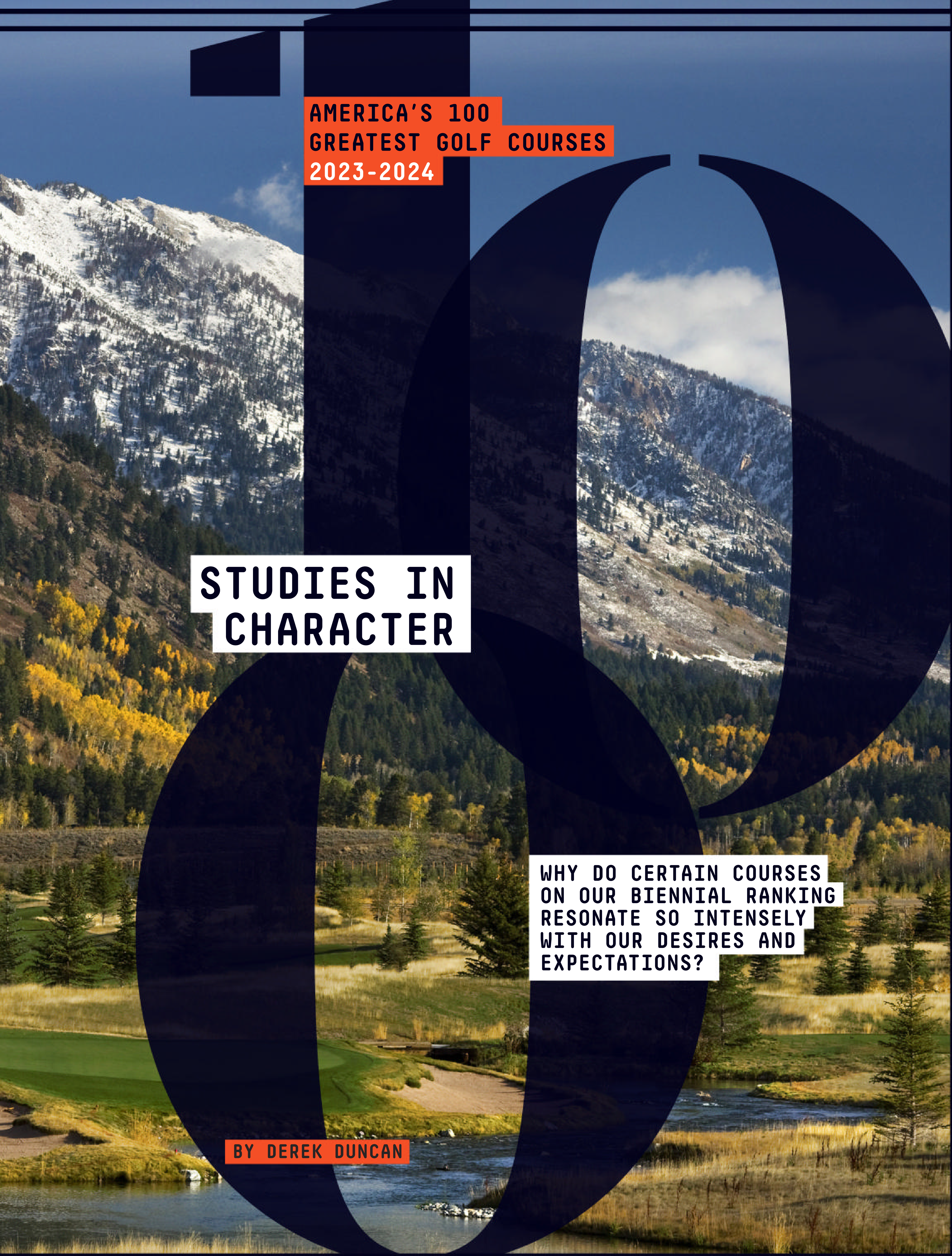
Titleist
PRO V
iCapital
Mutual of Omaha

SCHOOLS

Watch Cam's miked-up range session pounding drivers in our latest "Undercover Lesson" on Golf Digest Schools. Subscribers can access programs from top teachers and players at schools.golfdigest.com.

STARGAZER
Tom Fazio's
Shooting Star near
Jackson, Wyo.,
is No. 98.

AMERICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2023-2024



STUDIES IN CHARACTER

WHY DO CERTAIN COURSES ON OUR BIENNIAL RANKING RESONATE SO INTENSELY WITH OUR DESIRES AND EXPECTATIONS?

BY DEREK DUNCAN

SPRINGBOARD
Old Town Club in Winston-Salem, N.C., makes the biggest move in the ranking, surging from No. 92 to No. 54.

What does it mean for a golf course to have "character"? Can character be quantified, or is it more like "charisma," something that's easy to spot in a personality but difficult to explain? Most of us agree that some golf courses have character and others don't, but how does one define what creates that character, or calculate how much a course has?

This is a question—admittedly a tough one—we ask our course-ranking panelists to consider as they submit the tens of thousands of evaluations that make up the Golf Digest biennial ranking of America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses and Second 100 Greatest Golf Courses. (*To see the full Second 100 ranking, visit golfdigest.com*). The five other categories we use to identify greatness can be more empirically assessed. Shot Options asks to what degree a course's layout presents mental and tactical choices, with rewards to architecture that requires a mix of thoughtfulness and execution, and plays differently day to day, shot to shot. Challenge puts courses on a continuum of just that: challenge, judging the subtle and not-so-subtle ways a design can bring out the best in a scratch player. Layout Variety deals with the physical aspects of a course, including hole structures (lengths, left and right shapes, orientations, uphill and downhill), distinctiveness (how much hole-to-hole variety the architecture exhibits) and the routing (whether the course takes you on a compelling, well-connected journey that uses the best elements of the site). Conditioning awards points to courses that maintain (at least most of the time) dry, firm fairways and firm, receptive greens that roll true (but

PREVIOUS PAGES: COURTESY OF SHOOTING STAR • OLD TOWN CLUB: JON CAVALIER

not fast—green speeds are taken up in Challenge and Shot Options), and Aesthetics determines the attractiveness of everything we see, from scenery to the arrangements and shapes of bunkers, greens, fairway lines and other hazards.

Character is the X factor. Four years ago, it replaced a longstanding category known as Ambiance, carrying the following definition: How well does the overall feel and atmosphere of the course reflect or uphold the traditional values of the game? By that standard it was distinctly non-architectural, and the concept of decorating golf courses for upholding "traditional values" (the category was originally known as Tradition) seems increasingly out of touch. One solution would have been to remove Ambiance from the criteria, but we also believe it's important to acknowledge the *je ne sais quoi* that sets some properties apart from others. Beyond a calculus of yardages, bunker placement and neat turf, what is it about certain courses that resonates so intensely with our desires and expectations while others outwardly check all the boxes

AMERICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2023-2024

1. PINE VALLEY G.C.
(Previous rank: 1)
Clementon, N.J.
George Crump & H.S. Colt (1918)
7,181 yards/par 70
Score: 71.9553

2. AUGUSTA (Ga.) NATIONAL G.C. (2)
Alister MacKenzie &
Bobby Jones (1933)
7,510 yards/par 72
Score: 71.2668

3. CYPRESS POINT CLUB (3)
Pebble Beach
Alister MacKenzie &
Robert Hunter (1929)
6,524 yards/par 72
Score: 69.8764

4. SHINNECOCK HILLS G.C. (4)
Southampton, N.Y.
William Flynn (1931)
7,445 yards/par 70
Score: 69.2670

5. OAKMONT (Pa.) C.C. (5)
Henry Fownes (1903)
7,255 yards/par 71
Score: 68.9203

6. MERION G.C. (EAST) (6)
Ardmore, Pa.
Hugh Wilson (1912)
6,996 yards/par 70
Score: 67.4506

7. NATIONAL G. LINKS OF AMERICA (7)
Southampton, N.Y.
C.B. Macdonald (1911)
6,935 yards/par 72
Score: 67.2655

8. SAND HILLS G.C. (10)
Mullen, Neb.
Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw (1995)
7,089 yards/par 71
Score: 66.3814

9. FISHERS ISLAND (N.Y.) CLUB (9)
Seth Raynor & Charles Banks (1926)
6,615 yards/par 70
Score: 66.3800

10. SEMINOLE G.C. (11)
Juno Beach, Fla.
Donald Ross (1929)
6,836 yards/par 72
Score: 66.0269

11. WINGED FOOT G.C. (WEST) (12)
Mamaroneck, N.Y.
A.W. Tillinghast (1923)
7,477 yards/par 72
Score: 65.6893

12. PEBBLE BEACH G. LINKS (8)
Jack Neville & Douglas Grant (1919)
7,075 yards/par 72
Score: 65.6063

13. CHICAGO G.C. (13)
Wheaton, Ill.
C.B. Macdonald (1894)/
Seth Raynor (1923)
6,877 yards/par 70
Score: 65.5358

14. CRYSTAL DOWNS C.C. (14)
Frankfort, Mich.
Alister MacKenzie &
Perry Maxwell (1931)
6,560 yards/par 70
Score: 65.4684

15. FRIAR'S HEAD G.C. (16)
Baiting Hollow, N.Y.
Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw (2002)
7,071 yards/par 71
Score: 65.0757

16. LOS ANGELES C.C. (NORTH) (19)
George C. Thomas Jr. (1921)
7,530 yards/par 71
Score: 64.7568

17. MUIRFIELD VILLAGE G.C. (15)
Dublin, Ohio
Jack Nicklaus &
Desmond Muirhead (1974)
7,543 yards/par 72
Score: 64.6556

18. RIVIERA C.C. (22)
Pacific Palisades, Calif.
George C. Thomas Jr. &
William P. Bell (1926)
7,040 yards/par 71
Score: 64.5233

19. THE COUNTRY CLUB (MAIN COURSE) (17)
Brookline, Mass.
Willie Campbell (1895)/
Alex Campbell (1902)
7,264 yards/par 70
Score: 64.4907

20. OAKLAND HILLS C.C. (SOUTH) (21)
Bloomfield Hills, Mich.
Donald Ross (1917)
7,509 yards/par 72
Score: 64.4341

21. PACIFIC DUNES (18)
Bandon, Ore.
Tom Doak (2001)
6,633 yards/par 71
Score: 64.2969

22. OAK HILL C.C. (EAST) (20)
Rochester, N.Y.
Donald Ross (1925)
7,360 yards/par 70
Score: 64.2340

23. PRAIRIE DUNES C.C. (25)
Hutchinson, Kan.
Perry Maxwell (1937)/
Press Maxwell, second nine (1957)
6,947 yards/par 70
Score: 64.1158

24. THE OCEAN COURSE (24)
Kiawah Island, S.C.
Pete Dye & Alice Dye (1991)
7,849 yards/par 72
Score: 63.8552

25. PEACHTREE G.C. (30)
Atlanta
Robert Trent Jones &
Bobby Jones (1947)
7,414 yards/par 72
Score: 63.8470

but leave us feeling hungry? The reason we yearn to see different courses—and read rankings—is inseparable from this question.

A club's tournament history, clubhouse, reputation or exclusivity can all enhance the aura, but we don't publish a ranking of auras. Ours is a compilation of America's Greatest Golf Courses, so the discussion needs to be grounded in the architecture and other substantive elements of the property, including attributes that add to the playing experience but don't fit neatly into other categories. Thus, Character now asks: *How much does the golf course exude ingenuity and uniqueness and possess profound characteristics that you would consider outstanding for its era?*

Under this definition, Character sets golf courses against not an abstract standard of tradition or prestige but against other courses and time periods. Character is a measure of how unique or profound the architecture, setting or landscape is compared to its peers. Examples of exceptional character by this definition would include Pete Dye's early courses from the 1960s. At the time they were built, designs like Crooked Stick (ranked 101 with a 7.6551 Character score), The Golf Club (No. 44, 8.0441) and Harbour Town (No. 160, 7.4163) were ingenious. Their small greens and hand-crafted shaping, the artful layering of hazards and use of atypical materials like railroad ties shocked the architectural salon. As well as being invigorating places to play golf, these courses are time capsules that stand apart from other designs of the era and continue to be unique touchstones within Dye's portfolio.

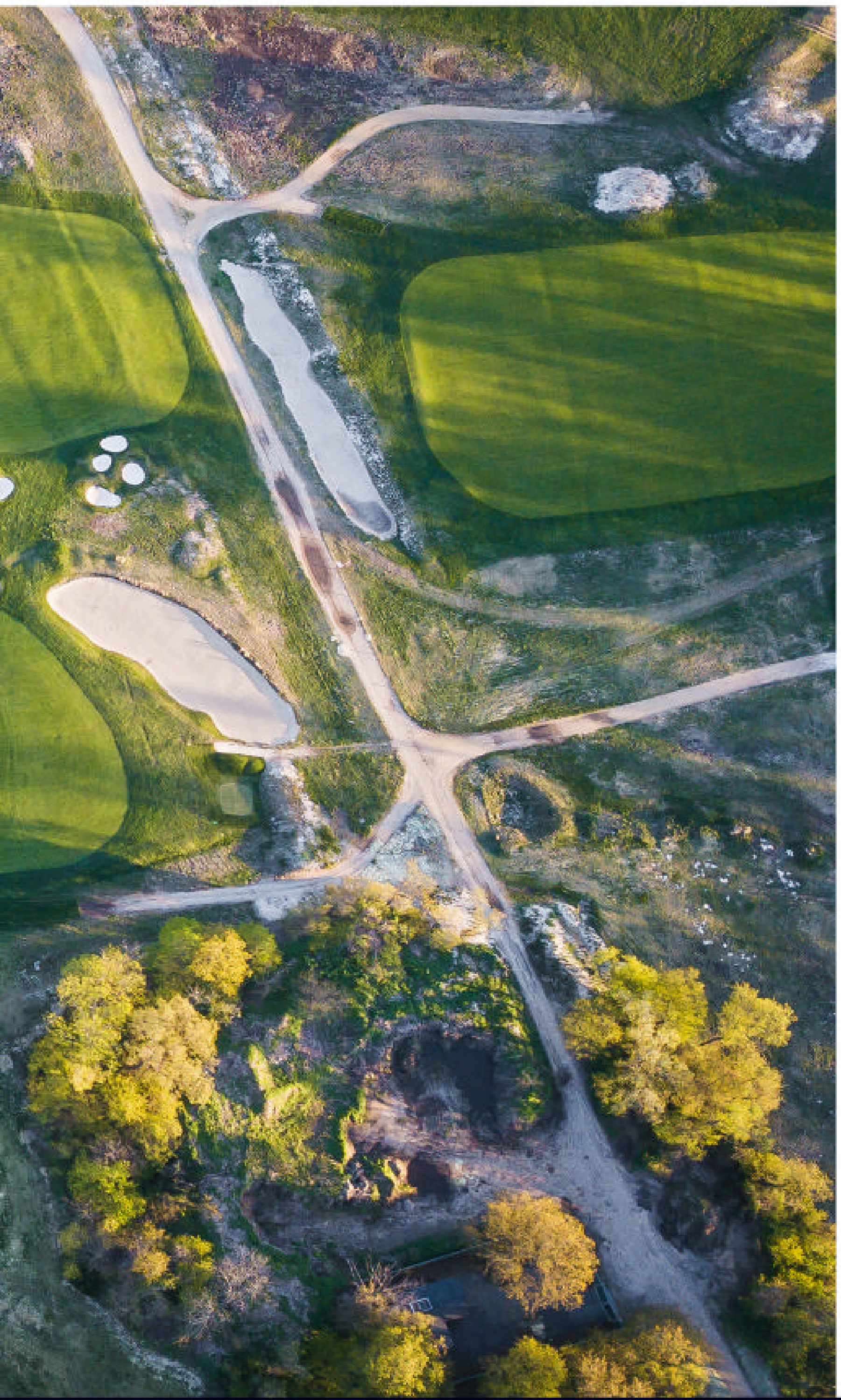
It takes a certain degree of architectural acumen and perspective to assess the character of a golf course. No. 64 Garden City Golf Club (8.1452) always ranked among the top 25 courses in Ambiance because of its 100-plus-year history, old-world aura and charming clubhouse. Does it fare as well under a different set of criteria that looks only at the architecture and setting? It should. Garden City was originally designed by Devereux Emmet in the late 1890s amid the first wave of courses in the United States, then remodeled beginning about a decade later by Walter J. Travis. It remains arguably the top achievement of both men: for Emmet because of the brilliant routing and sequencing of holes across an awkwardly shaped property and Travis because of his skill in restyling greens and deepening bunkers, with a nod to the great holes from the

UNIQUE AND PROFOUND
At No. 64, Garden City exemplifies architectural character.

PATRICK KOENIG

United Kingdom. Though located in the congested west end of Long Island, Garden City plays over the subtle contours of the site like the great spacious courses on the east end, unfurling across the calm, grassy countryside like something imported from the London heathlands. The design weaves contrasting sources of inspiration into something original. That's character.

Nanea, on the east side of Hawaii's Big Island, breaks into the 100 Greatest ranking for the first time this year, at No. 49. It opened in 2003, but it has taken two decades for the remote private club to garner the 50 evaluations needed to qualify. The design runs up big numbers in Aesthetics and Conditioning but also scores high in Character (7.9692). Most courses on the islands are built along the coast, often in tropical environments, but Nanea stands out for its arid, high-country setting on a lava plateau beneath Mount Hualalai. The design, consisting of broad and bumpy holes that tumble into infinity greens set amid seas of prairie grasses with constant views of the ocean, is more Scottish Highlands than Hawaiian, which makes it not only singular in this context but sensible because that's where architect David McLay Kidd is from. This



AMERICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2023-2024

26. WHISTLING STRAITS (STRAITS) (23)
Haven, Wis.
Pete Dye (1998)
7,790 yards/par 72
Score: 63.7940

27. SHADOW CREEK (27)
North Las Vegas, Nev.
Tom Fazio & Steve Wynn (1990)
7,560 yards/par 72
Score: 63.7878

28. SOUTHERN HILLS C.C. (32)
Tulsa
Perry Maxwell (1936)
7,556 yards/par 71
Score: 63.7283

29. PINEHURST (N.C.) RESORT (NO. 2) (29)
Donald Ross (1935, final revision)
7,588 yards/par 72
Score: 63.6242

30. PIKEWOOD NATIONAL G.C. (33)
Morgantown, W.Va.
J. Robert Gwynne & John Raese (2009)
7,649 yards/par 72
Score: 63.5942

31. THE HONORS COURSE (28)
Ooltewah, Tenn.
Pete Dye (1983)
7,450 yards/par 72
Score: 63.5594

32. WADE HAMPTON G.C. (26)
Cashiers, N.C.
Tom Fazio (1987)
7,395 yards/par 72
Score: 63.4108

33. SAN FRANCISCO G.C. (36)
A.W. Tillinghast (1924)
6,836 yards/par 71
Score: 63.1028

34. OHOOPEE MATCH CLUB (NEW)
Cobbtown, Ga.
Gil Hanse & Jim Wagner (2019)
7,325 yards/par 72
Score: 63.0996

35. THE OLYMPIC CLUB (LAKE) (34)
San Francisco
Sam Whiting (1924)
7,170 yards/par 71
Score: 63.0144

36. BALLYNEAL G. & HUNT CLUB (44)
Holyoke, Colo.
Tom Doak (2006)
7,147 yards/par 71
Score: 62.9941

37. GOZZER RANCH G. & LAKE C. (31)
Harrison, Idaho
Tom Fazio (2007)
7,317 yards/par 72
Score: 62.9790

38. THE ALOTIAN CLUB (35)
Roland, Ark.
Tom Fazio (2004)
7,500 yards/par 72
Score: 62.9288

39. BETHPAGE STATE PARK (BLACK) (40)
Farmingdale, N.Y.
A.W. Tillinghast with Joseph H. Burbeck (1936)
7,468 yards/par 71
Score: 62.8142

40. BANDON (Ore.) DUNES (37)
David McLay Kidd (1999)
7,212 yards/par 72
Score: 62.8016

41. TPC SAWGRASS (PLAYERS STADIUM) (52)
Ponte Vedra Beach
Pete Dye & Alice Dye (1980)
7,275 yards/par 72
Score: 62.6824

42. CONGAREE G.C. (39)
Ridgeland, S.C.
Tom Fazio (2018)
7,725 yards/par 72
Score: 62.6341

43. SEBONACK G.C. (38)
Southampton, N.Y.
Tom Doak & Jack Nicklaus (2006)
7,512 yards/par 72
Score: 62.5547

44. THE GOLF CLUB (43)
New Albany, Ohio
Pete Dye (1967)
7,433 yards/par 72
Score: 62.5103

45. BALTUSROL G.C. (LOWER) (45)
Springfield, N.J.
A.W. Tillinghast (1922)
7.550 yards/par 72
Score: 62.4685

46. CASTLE PINES G.C. (48)
Castle Rock, Colo.
Jack Nicklaus (1981)
7,701 yards/par 72
Score: 62.4346

47. CAMARGO CLUB (42)
Indian Hill, Ohio
Seth Raynor & Charles Banks (1927)
6,659 yards/par 70
Score: 62.4272

48. ERIN HILLS (Wis.) (46)
Michael Hurdzan, Dana Fry & Ron Whitten (2006)
7,731 yards/par 72
Score: 62.3720

49. NANEA G.C. (NEW)
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii
David McLay Kidd (2003)
7,464 yards/par 73
Score: 62.2824

50. MYOPIA HUNT CLUB (69)
South Hamilton, Mass.
H.C. Leeds (1898)
6,555 yards/par 72
Score: 62.2097

DAVE SANSOM

TICKET PUNCHED Ohoopee Match Club in southern Georgia makes the ranking for the first time at No. 34.

was Kidd's second design, created when still in the inspired tailwinds of the original, organic Bandon Dunes course and before his architecture took a detour toward naturalistic brutalism. One of the questions posed by Character is whether you would learn something by playing the course, including something about the architect, and you would at Nanea. Creations that illuminate periods in an artist's career should drive up the Character score.

Two other courses debut in the second half of the ranking on the strength of elevated Character scores. Old Elm Club on the north side of Chicago (No. 164, 7.6802) has an architectural pedigree unlike nearly any other course. Legendary British architect Harry S. Colt laid out the course in 1913 on one of his few visits to the United States, collaborating on the design with Donald Ross, then best known for being the head professional at Pinehurst. When Colt departed, Ross carried out the construction of the holes. Most of that Colt/Ross design has been carefully excavated and reclaimed over the past 13 years by architect Drew Rogers.

Sankaty Head Golf Club celebrates a centennial birthday this year with its first national ranking. It was designed by a little-known amateur player named Emerson Armstrong, a novice who captured the essence of the links of the United Kingdom and the sprawling, distinctive setting of eastern Nantucket Island every bit as well as a more seasoned architect could have. Since 2017, Jim Urbina has lovingly restored the course's windswept, old-time golf landscape, and the reward is a ranking of 196.

The highest Character score is No. 2 Augusta National's 9.3519 (followed closely by Cypress Point and Pine Valley). When it comes to "profound characteristics," Augusta National excels with its prominent topography, a set of sculptural greens unlike anything else in golf and a presentation of strategic golf holes that have been the inspiration for hundreds of other courses. The culmination of a lifetime of architecture development by Alister MacKenzie supplemented by the input of Bobby Jones also gives it profound design lineage. Neverending alterations by as many as nine architects, however, have narrowed and reshaped the course, boomeranging the design away from its once distinguished provenance. It might be assumed these changes—many of them eradicating the original premise of the architecture—would impact the course's scores, but Augusta National appears im-

pervious to such critical assessments: Since 1985, it has never been outside the top three in the United States. Character, if you have it, is indelible.

UPDATES

The most notable change in the scoring of courses for 2023-2024 is the removal of the Distinctiveness category, which was a descendant of a category called Memorability. There's no longer a separate score for how distinct the holes of a course are from one to the next. Distinctiveness and Layout Variety had the closest scoring correlation of any two categories, so panelists now take up this consideration within Layout Variety where they are already looking at hole-to-hole diversity and the routing. Points for Layout Variety are now doubled, as are the points for Shot Options.

Scores for each course are accumulated over a rolling 10-year period, meaning this ranking covers the years 2013 through 2022. Because no golf course is the same as it was a decade ago, we've begun age-weighting the scores as well, so evaluations from 2022 factor more heavily than those from 2021 and so on. To further ensure the ranking of America's

AMERICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2023-2024

51. WHISPERING PINES G.C. (55)
Trinity, Texas
Chet Williams (2000)
7,468 yards/par 72
Score: 62.1993

52. MAIDSTONE CLUB (64)
East Hampton, N.Y.
Willie Park Jr. & Jack Park (1924)
6,665 yards/par 72
Score: 62.1863

53. VICTORIA NATIONAL G.C. (47)
Newburgh, Ind.
Tom Fazio (1999)
7,242 yards/par 72
Score: 62.1818

54. OLD TOWN CLUB (92)
Winston-Salem, N.C.
Perry Maxwell (1939)
7,037 yards/par 70
Score: 62.1713

55. SHOREACRES (54)
Lake Bluff, Ill.
Seth Raynor (1921)
6,729 yards/par 70
Score: 62.1348

56. ROCK CREEK CATTLE CO. (81)
Deer Lodge, Mont.
Tom Doak (2008)
7,466 yards/par 71
Score: 62.1092

57. SOMERSET HILLS C.C. (50)
Bernardsville, N.J.
A.W. Tillinghast (1918)
6,784 yards/par 71
Score: 62.0421

58. INVERNESS CLUB (65)
Toledo, Ohio
Donald Ross (1919)/
Andrew Green (2018)
7,730 yards/par 71
Score: 62.0315

59. SLEEPY HOLLOW C.C. (62)
Scarborough-on-Hudson, N.Y.
C.B. Macdonald (1915)/
A.W. Tillinghast (1928)
6,902 yards/par 70
Score: 61.8981

60. SCIOTO C.C. (68)
Columbus, Ohio
Donald Ross (1916)
6,975 yards/par 71
Score: 61.8687

61. WINGED FOOT G.C. (EAST) (41)
Mamaroneck, N.Y.
A.W. Tillinghast (1923)
6,808 yards/par 72
Score: 61.8686

62. MONTEREY PENINSULA C.C. (SHORE) (53)
Pebble Beach
Mike Strantz (2004)
6,873 yards/par 72
Score: 61.8681

63. OLD SANDWICH G.C. (58)
Plymouth, Mass.
Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw (2005)
6,908 yards/par 71
Score: 61.8554

64. GARDEN CITY (N.Y.) G.C. (61)
Devereux Emmet (1899)/Walter J. Travis (1913)
6,922 yards/par 73
Score: 61.7638

65. BANDON (Ore.) TRAILS (67)
Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw (2005)
6,788 yards/par 71
Score: 61.7369

66. OAK TREE NATIONAL (57)
Edmond, Okla.
Pete Dye & Alice Dye (1976)
7,410 yards/par 71
Score: 61.7117

67. SPYGLASS HILL G. CSE. (51)
Pebble Beach
Robert Trent Jones (1966)
7,026 yards/par 72
Score: 61.7044

68. CHERRY HILLS C.C. (73)
Cherry Hills Village, Colo.
William Flynn (1923)
7,316 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6974

69. CALUSA PINES G.C. (74)
Naples, Fla.
Michael Hurdzan & Dana Fry (2001)
7,203 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6875

70. THE ESTANCIA CLUB (72)
Scottsdale. Tom Fazio (1995)
7,314 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6831

71. CALIFORNIA G.C. OF SAN FRANCISCO (101)
South San Francisco, Calif.
A. Vernon Macan (1926)/Kyle Phillips (2008)
7,216 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6385

72. OLD MACDONALD (56)
Bandon, Ore.
Tom Doak & Jim Urbina (2010)
6,944 yards/par 71
Score: 61.6345

73. CONGRESSIONAL C.C. (BLUE) (91) Bethesda, Md.
Devereux Emmet (1924)/
Robert Trent Jones (1962)/
Andrew Green (2021)
7,215 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6182

74. KINLOCH G.C. (66)
Manakin-Sabot, Va.
Lester George & Vinny Giles (2001)
7,373 yards/par 72
Score: 61.6114

75. BUTLER NATIONAL G.C. (49)
Oak Brook, Ill.
George Fazio & Tom Fazio (1974)
7,523 yards/par 71
Score: 61.6050

100 Greatest and Second 100 Greatest are as inclusive and as representative of current architecture as possible, the standard of eligibility has been lowered to 50 evaluations (collected over 10 years) from the previous 75.

THE VELVET ROPE

In addition to Nanea, four other courses enter the 100 Greatest ranking for the first time. The formerly unranked Ohoopee Match Club, a rustic, sand-and-scrub design in south Georgia from Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner, crashes the party at No. 34. The California Golf Club of San Francisco, known as Cal Club, a 2008 Kyle Phillips modification of a 1920s Vernon Macan design, debuts at No. 71. C.B. Macdonald's 1913 design at Piping Rock on Long Island, revived by Bruce Hepner in 2015, continues its ascension from No. 109 to No. 97. Lastly, Tom Fazio's Shooting Star near Jackson, Wyo., previously ranked 123, vaults 25 places to No. 98.

Thirteen other courses appear in the Second 100 Greatest for the first time. These include Sheep Ranch at Bandon Dunes (115), Clear Creek Tahoe (131), Manele (140), The Dye Course at White Oak (142), Blessings (144), Old Elm Club (164), Hollywood (170), The Reserve at Moonlight Basin (176), The Bear's Club (180), Medalist (181), Karsten Creek (186), Sankaty Head (196) and The Harvester Club (197). Tom Fazio's Sage Valley near Aiken, S.C., is back in the ranking at No. 153 after last appearing in 2017-2018, as is Rees Jones' Atlantic Golf Club (No. 175), which previously appeared in 2015-2016.

HIGH-RISERS

The biggest move this cycle belongs to Old Town Club, the Perry Maxwell design in Winston-Salem that rockets 38 places to No. 54. Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw's renovation of the 1939 design in 2013 catapulted Old Town to its first ranking of No. 98 in 2019-2020, and subsequent fine-tuning by the club

STEADY RISER Cal Club has made gains in the past six rankings, from No. 147 to No. 71.

EVAN SCHILLER

and Dave Axland has helped it rise further. Next in line is Moraine, the 1930 Nipper Campbell course in Dayton that was renovated by Keith Foster in 2013, leaping 31 spots to No. 146, followed by Cal Club's surge. Southern Highlands, an artful Robert Trent Jones II design in Las Vegas, also jumped 30 other courses to No. 161, followed by Eastward Ho! (26 places), Tom Doak's Rock Creek Cattle Company (25), Shooting Star (25), and Myopia Hunt Club, the 1898 Herbert Leeds design outside Boston (19).

Perry Maxwell, who died in 1952, had a fine year with the ascension of Old Town Club but also with Southern Hills in Tulsa, rising four notches, and Prairie Dunes in Kansas, scratching up two spots to 23. Coore and Crenshaw added two new courses (Sheep Ranch and Clear Creek Tahoe), giving them 10 in the first 200, though their net gain was just one as Ozarks National slid off the list. While Oak Hill's East Course, site of this year's PGA Championship, retreated slightly, Andrew Green's ambitious remodels of Congressional's Blue Course,

AMERICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2023-2024

76. THE VALLEY CLUB OF MONTECITO (Calif.) (78)
Alister MacKenzie &
Robert Hunter (1929)
6,610 yards/par 72
Score: 61.5608

77. DIAMOND CREEK G.C. (86)
Banner Elk, N.C.
Tom Fazio (2003)
7,175 yards/par 70
Score: 61.5550

78. ESSEX COUNTY CLUB (79)
Manchester, Mass.
Donald Ross (1917)
6,555 yards/par 70
Score: 61.5442

79. MONTEREY PENINSULA C.C. (DUNES) (80)
Pebble Beach
Seth Raynor (1926)/Tom Fazio,
Tim Jackson & David Kahn (2017)
7,090 yards/par 72
Score: 61.5078

80. BALTUSROL G.C. (UPPER) (63)
Springfield, N.J.
A.W. Tillinghast (1922)
7,348 yards/par 72
Score: 61.4455

81. QUAKER RIDGE G.C. (76)
Scarsdale, N.Y.
A.W. Tillinghast (1918)
7,008 yards/par 70
Score: 61.3877

82. PLAINFIELD C.C. (75)
Edison, N.J.
Donald Ross (1921)
7,110 yards/par 72
Score: 61.3093

83. DALLAS NATIONAL G.C. (71)
Dallas
Tom Fazio (2002)
7,372 yards/par 72
Score: 61.2596

84. INTERLACHEN C.C. (59)
Edina, Minn.
William Watson (1911)/
Donald Ross (1922)
6,981 yards/par 72
Score: 61.2371

85. CANYATA G.C. (82)
Marshall, Ill.
Bob Lohmann &
Mike Benkusky (2004)
7,266 yards/par 72
Score: 61.1832

86. MILWAUKEE C.C. (70)
River Hills, Wis.
C.H. Alison (1929)
7,101 yards/par 72
Score: 61.1830

87. VALHALLA G.C. (93)
Louisville
Jack Nicklaus (1986)
7,645 yards/par 72
Score: 61.1696

88. HUDSON NATIONAL G.C. (89)
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.
Tom Fazio (1996)
7,151 yards/par 70
Score: 61.1522

89. THE KITTANSETT CLUB (77)
Marion, Mass.
William Flynn &
Frederic Hood (1922)
6,934 yards/par 71
Score: 61.1190

90. BOSTON G.C. (84)
Hingham, Mass.
Gil Hanse & Jim Wagner (2004)
7,062 yards/par 71
Score: 61.1045

91. THE QUARRY AT LA QUINTA (Calif.) (85)
Tom Fazio (1994)
7,083 yards/par 72
Score: 61.0802

92. ARCADIA (Mich.) BLUFFS (BLUFFS) (83)
Rick Smith & Warren Henderson (2001)
7,300 yards/par 72
Score: 61.0741

93. MEDINAH (Ill.) C.C. (NO. 3) (60)
Tom Bendelow (1928)
7,657 yards/par 72
Score: 61.0294

94. PETE DYE G.C. (87)
Bridgeport, W.Va.
Pete Dye (1994)
7,308 yards/par 72
Score: 60.8975

95. ARONIMINK G.C. (94)
Newtown Square, Pa.
Donald Ross (1928)
7,280 yards/par 70
Score: 60.8931

96. PASATIEMPO G.C. (98)
Santa Cruz, Calif.
Alister MacKenzie (1929)
6,495 yards/par 70
Score: 60.8592

97. PIPING ROCK CLUB (109)
Locust Valley, N.Y.
C.B. Macdonald (1913)
6,852 yards/par 71
Score: 60.7108

98. SHOOTING STAR G.C. (123)
Teton Village, Wyo.
Tom Fazio (2009)
7,633 yards/par 72
Score: 60.6547

99. OLYMPIA FIELDS (Ill.) C.C. (NORTH) (88)
Willie Park Jr. (1922)
7,353 yards/par 70
Score: 60.6336

100. SPRING HILL G.C. (100)
Wayzata, Minn.
Tom Fazio (1999)
7,035 yards/par 72
Score: 60.6205

TO SEE THE COMPLETE SECOND 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES RANKING, VISIT GOLFDIGEST.COM.

SCENE-STEALER The Jack Nicklaus-designed Manele Golf Course in Lanai, Hawaii, enters the list at No. 140.

BRIAN OAR

Scioto, Inverness Club and Wannamoisett continue to pay off as those courses climbed a combined 36 places. Despite passing away before it was ready for play, Pete Dye also added The Dye Course at White Oak in Florida, the Best New Course for 2022 that comes in at No. 142.

FREE FALLIN'

The most notable plunge in the ranking is measured not so much in distance but newsworthiness: For the first time in the 56-year history of our numerical ranking, Pebble Beach is not in the top 10, falling from eighth to 12th. The overall score dropped by more than 1.75 points, and the course retreated slightly in each of the six categories.

Big falls also befell Doak's Dismal River Red Course in Nebraska, which slipped 31 places, and the Jack Nicklaus-designed Spring Creek Ranch in Tennessee that dropped 30 spots. Two courses from similar Gen-X vintages, Sahalee in Washington State (Ted Robinson, 1969) and Butler National in Chicago (George and Tom Fazio, 1974), each dipped 26 slots. The most sizable drop, however, was Tributary, a McLay Kidd design in Idaho that tumbled 46 places and sits at No. 199. It wasn't a good cycle for Idaho courses in general, with Jim Engh's club at Black Rock plummeting 36 spots to No. 141, and Tom Fazio's Gozzer Ranch backing up six places to No. 37.

This was a theme for Fazio, who has dominated the ranking for the past two decades. In addition to Shooting Star, a number of courses like The Estancia Club, Diamond Creek, Hudson National, Martis Camp and both courses at Whisper Rock moved forward, but 16 of his designs retreated, including large drops by Quail Hollow (a Fazio redesign of a 1961 George Cobb original), Kansas' Flint Hills National, Caves Valley in Maryland and Galloway National in south New Jersey. Nevertheless, Fazio still boasts 32 courses in the national ranking, including 15 in the first 100. That outpaces, once again, Dye and Nicklaus (each with 14 overall), Ross and A.W. Tillinghast (each with 13), Coore and Crenshaw (10), Doak (nine) and Seth Raynor (nine).

REMEDIATION

Major renovations should always be undertaken for the benefit of the turf, lost architectural features and the memberships and golfers who play the course, and never as an attempt to climb in the

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ranking. That's particularly true for courses already on the 100 Greatest and Second 100 Greatest lists—they are ranked where they are because their scores are already high, and there's no guarantee that a remodel will deliver marks better than those they are already earning.

When we last issued the ranking in Spring 2021, we were curious to see how remodels of four prominent 100 Greatest clubs would alter their standings—not very much. Muirfield Village was rebuilt after the 2020 Memorial Tournament, and it fell two notches in the ranking to No. 17. Hanse and Wagner orchestrated a significant paring back of Oakland Hills' South Course, clearing trees, expanding greens and moving bunkers back to where Donald Ross had them, leading to a jump of a single spot to No. 20. Their work on Baltusrol's Lower Course was not quite as substantial, and it remains right where it was at No. 45. Only Green's efforts to reimagine Congressional's Blue course—stripping away trees, reconceptualizing bunkers and greens and building back land movement that had been graded away—paid large dividends as the course moves from No. 91 to No. 73.

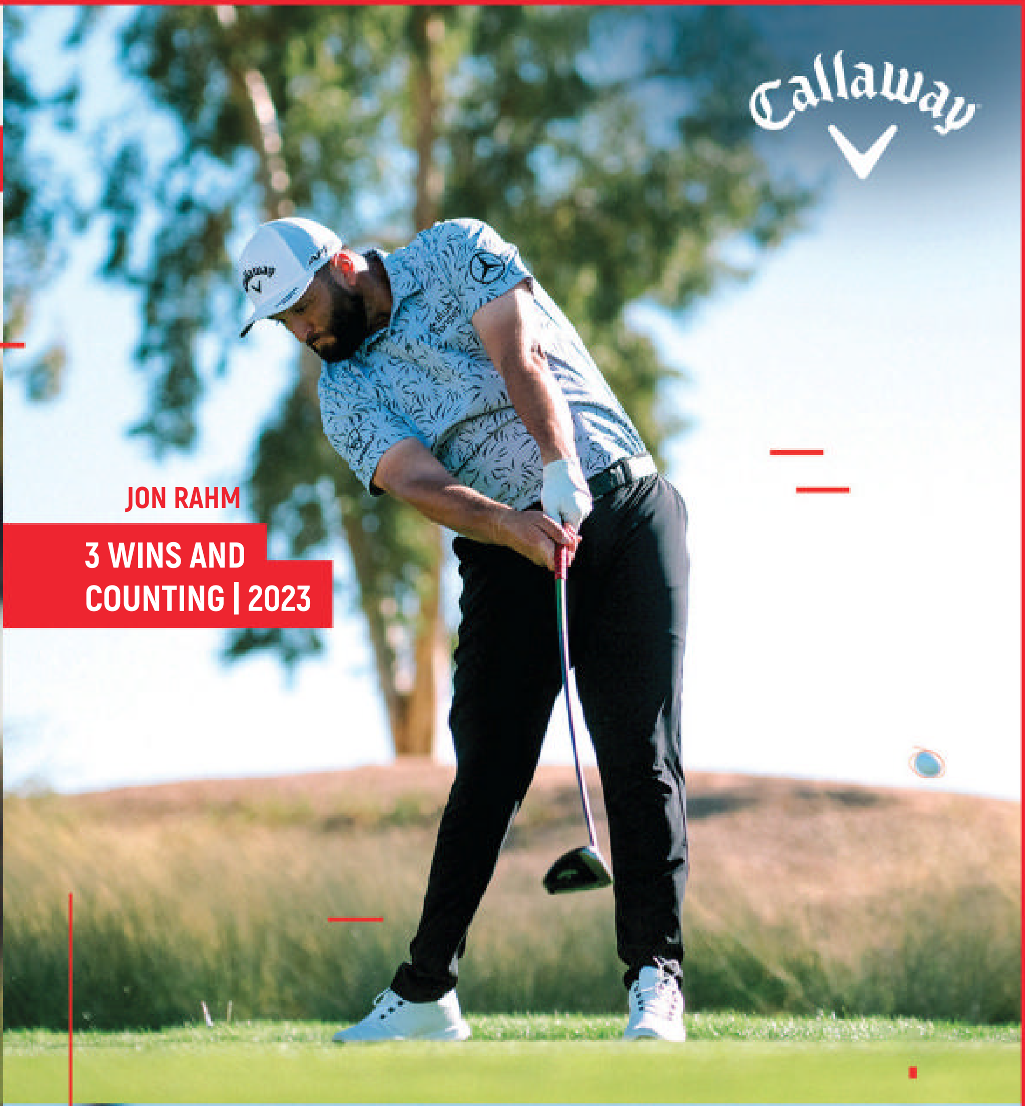
For every Maidstone, Inverness Club, Los Angeles Country Club or Sleepy Hollow that has been resuscitated in the ranking by a successful remodel, there are courses like Winged Foot (East and West), Quaker Ridge, Aronimink, Fox Chapel and last year's Best Renovation runner up Wannamoisett that don't receive worthwhile bumps. What a serious renovation may be better at is stopping the bleeding. This is the hope of five current and former 100 Greatest stalwarts that plummeted in this year's ranking by an average of almost 24 places: Medinah's No. 3 course, Interlachen, Baltusrol's Upper Course, East Lake and Colonial.

Each course is scheduled to begin a major makeover in the next few years, potentially restoring their previous positions—Medinah by the Australian firm of Ogilvy, Cocking and Mead; Interlachen and East Lake by Green; and Baltusrol and Colonial by Hanse and Wagner. For these clubs, given their rich history in the ranking, they have nowhere to go but back up. Just as intriguing will be to see if Hanse and Wagner's current remodel of The Olympic Club (No. 35) cooks up the right recipe to get the famed Lake Course back inside the top 20 where it resided continually from 1969 through 2004.

HIT MACHINE Clear Creek Tahoe in Nevada is one of 10 Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw-designed courses among the top 200.

COURTESY OF CLEAR CREEK TAHOE

ATTHAYA THITIKUL
LPGA ROOKIE OF THE YEAR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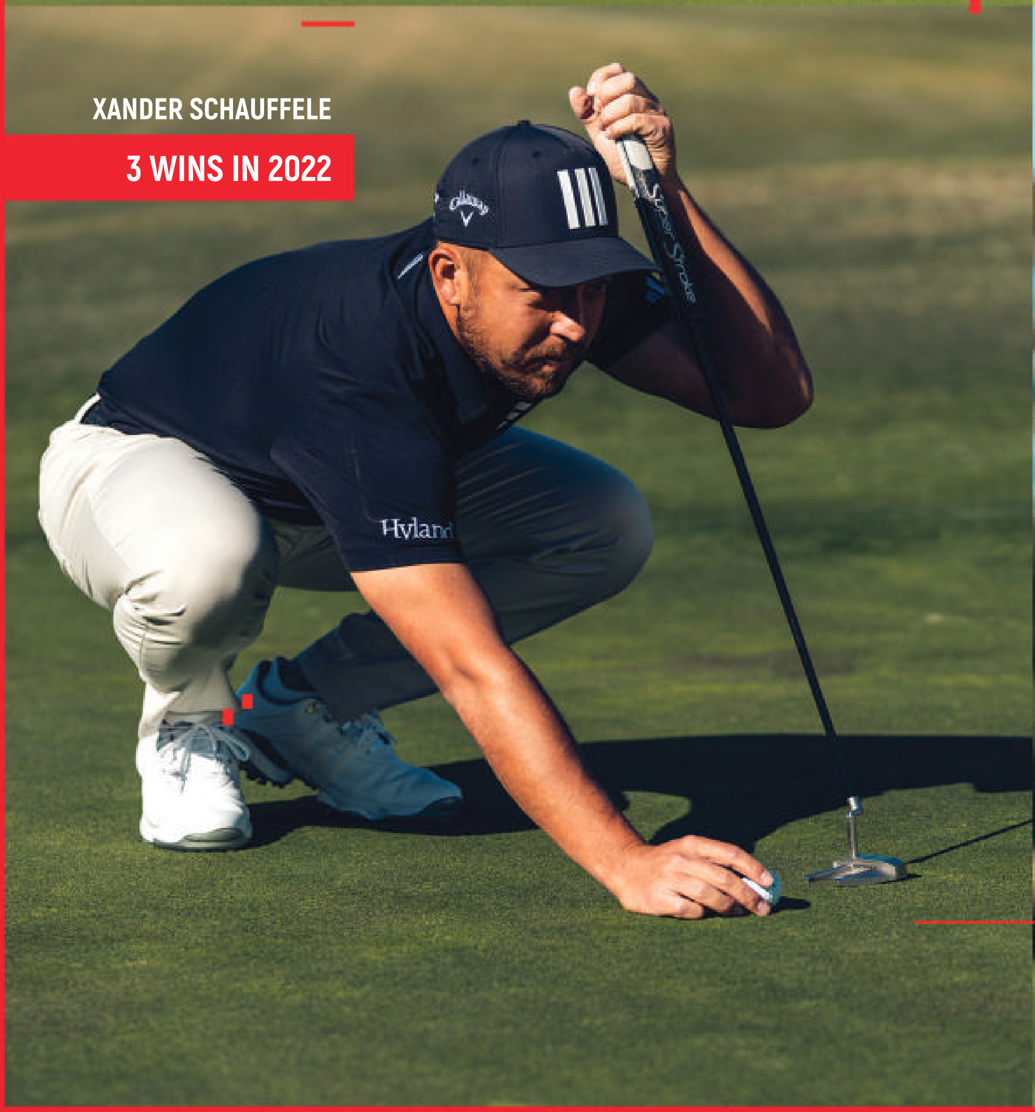
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JACK VS. NICKLAUS

HOW DID THE GAME'S GREATEST CHAMPION BECOME EMBROILED IN A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE COMPANY HE FOUNDED?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JESSE RIESER

In a threadbare courtroom in lower Manhattan, the 82-year-old defendant took care to avoid the power cords taped to the floor as he mounted the witness stand. The clerk asked him to state his name and provide his business address.

"Jack William Nicklaus," he said, "I don't even know a business address." He gave his home address instead.

That, in a way, was the whole case right there. As his subsequent testimony made clear, Nicklaus still has a sharp memory, so he may have *chosen* to forget his business address, which would have been understandable under the circumstances. The plaintiff in the case is, in fact, Nicklaus' own business, and the case is captioned, improbably enough, *Nicklaus Companies, LLC v. Jack W. Nicklaus*. The lawsuit was filed in May 2022, and it's very much ongoing. The case raises a variety of complex legal issues, but the most important is this: What the hell is going on here?

Nicklaus' demeanor can be as revealing as his words on the record. That was apparent when I recently visited him at what's known in Nicklaus' world as the "family office," which is about three miles from the "business" office—the one he couldn't remember—in Palm Beach County, Florida. Now 83, Nicklaus is a bit stooped, and his golfing days are, alas, behind him. "I don't play golf anymore," he told me. "I played four times last year, all in May—twice at Augusta, and I shot 88, 87, and twice at Muirfield Village on the weekend before the tournament, and I shot 86, 84, and I said, 'That's enough.' " But despite the end of his playing career, even for fun, Nicklaus was in buoyant spirits. I asked him how he felt about his court appearance, which included two days of cross-examination. "I'll give you two phrases to describe the trial," he said, "One, I didn't want to do it, and two, it was a pleasure. I saw a light at the end of the tunnel—that I might get rid of this guy and might be able to go live a life. If I end up doing nothing other than not working for him, that would be worth it."

"This guy" is Howard Milstein, a New York real estate and banking magnate and Nicklaus' erstwhile business partner. They joined forces under Nicklaus' corporate banner in 2007, and their divorce has taken place like a bankruptcy once described by Ernest Hemingway: "Gradually, then suddenly."

For the ultimate control freak on the golf course, whose relentless, risk-averse style propelled him to 18 professional majors and arguably the greatest record in the history of the game, Nicklaus has had a surprisingly tumultuous business career, and the Milstein conflagration is the latest chapter. As with much else in Nicklaus' life, his business journey began with Arnold Palmer.

IN THE EARLY 1960S, WHEN EVEN the best pro golfers struggled to make a living, a young lawyer in Cleveland named Mark McCormack had an idea to broker deals for endorsements and exhibitions that would benefit the golfers and himself. His first client was Palmer, and together they created the modern sports economy. At the firm that came to be called the International Management Group, McCormack signed Gary Player as his second client and Nicklaus as his third. Palmer remained with McCormack and IMG for the rest of his life. Unlike his golf game, which often involved reckless gambles, Palmer's business career was serene and steady. He died a very rich man, thanks in part to IMG's ability to monetize for him the alchemical interaction of lemonade and iced tea.

Nicklaus made a different choice at an early crossroads in life in 1970, when he turned 30 and his father unexpectedly passed away at 56. Nicklaus left McCormack's stable and struck out in business on his own. "All I was doing was what every man eventually must do when he loses his father: growing up to the point of finally assuming full control of his own life," he later wrote.

By the time Nicklaus left McCormack, he had already started buying the real estate for Muirfield Village Golf Club, near his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, the future home of the Memorial Tournament. Nicklaus had chosen (against McCormack's advice) to finance the development of the club himself, and Nicklaus later wrote, "The project did come awfully close to taking me down the tubes." Muirfield depleted Nicklaus' resources before it opened in 1974, but it also gave him a new career as an eminent golf-course designer. As in tournament golf, Nicklaus' achievements as an architect quickly outstripped Palmer's, but his travails in business continued. By the mid-1980s, attempts to diversify his personal company, then known as Golden Bear Inc., proved disastrous. Nicklaus' investments included two troubled housing developments in the San Diego and New York areas and an eyewear company, a radio station, and oil and gas projects. By 1985, Nicklaus learned, according to his autobiography, that he and the company "personally were so deeply in debt and at risk in real estate and other nongolf-related projects as to face imminent financial disaster." In light of this pressure, Nicklaus' epic triumph in the 1986 Masters, at the age of 46, looks even more remarkable. (Nicklaus' paychecks as a player on the PGA Tour were miniscule by contemporary standards. He won 73 tournaments and earned $5.7 million in prize money, which puts him in 306th place on the all-time money list, just behind David Peoples. To start this year, Jon Rahm won three tournaments in six starts and earned nearly $10 million.)

Nicklaus brought in new management, shed nongolf-related businesses and concentrated on course design and what was supposed to be a network of high-end driving ranges. In 1996, he took the company, now called Golden Bear Golf Inc., public at $16 a share, but Nicklaus' vision for a sort of proto-Topgolf was ahead of its time, and the ranges did not prosper. Worse yet, two executives at his course-construction

JIM MANDEVILLE

HAPPIER TIMES
Nicklaus and Howard Milstein, on the day they became business partners in 2007.

> THE LEGAL QUESTION IN THE CASE IS WHAT EXACTLY HOWARD MILSTEIN BOUGHT FOR THE $175 MILLION TO NICKLAUS. WHAT "THE CONTRACT" SAYS ISN'T CLEAR.

subsidiary were found to have falsified records, and the company's losses, which had seemed to be a manageable $2.7 million, turned out to be $24 million. The value of the stock dropped so precipitously that shareholders filed a class-action suit against Nicklaus, and he ultimately bought out remaining shareholders for 75 cents a share and took the company private. (The two executives were convicted on federal charges and sentenced to prison.) Nicklaus' losses in Golden Bear Golf were in the range of $30 million. In 2000, he started over with a private company bearing a new name, the Nicklaus Companies, LLC.

THROUGHOUT THESE CHAPTERS, Nicklaus enjoyed several advantages. His integrity and honesty were never challenged. His reputation as a golfer flourished as he continued winning tournaments during the 1990s on the senior tour. His clothing lines remained popular, especially in Asia. Most importantly, despite his other business reverses, his career as a golf-course designer thrived. In the first decade of the new century, the Nicklaus Companies appeared to be on a healthy trajectory, and his chief financial officer at the time came to Nicklaus with an idea. "He says, 'You're not getting any younger,' " Nicklaus told me. "Maybe it's time to pass to my kids, let them monetize something, so they don't have to wait for me to kick the can to have any kind of money." The company hired an investment bank that valued the Nicklaus Companies at nearly $300 million and started looking for investors. Revenues for 2006 were $77 million and projected to be $100 million by 2009; profits, in theory, would go from $23 million to $43 million a year.

The company had a variety of suitors, but one put in a bid early and never changed it. Howard Milstein said he would invest $145 million in the company—predicting it could eventually be sold for a billion—and Nicklaus accepted the offer. Nicklaus promptly gave $20 million (after taxes) to each of his five children. In our conversation, Nicklaus called these gifts to his children "not a huge amount of money, but in this day and age, pretty good," an observation that reveals the rarefied circles in which he travels. By this point, Jack and Barbara Nicklaus had created the template for charitable giving by golf superstars, which Tiger Woods, most notably, has chosen to follow. The Milstein investment allowed the Nicklauses to expand their philanthropic interests, which have amounted to more than $200 million raised for children's health over the past two decades.

As of 2007, Nicklaus now had a business partner, though he retained ultimate control of the company. "I'm very unsophisticated," he told me. "I was a golfer, just retired from tournament golf. I knew nothing about business. I'm not a lawyer. I don't know what all that stuff is. I wish I did because I probably wouldn't have gotten into what I got into. I never knew what the word 'vet' meant. If I did, I probably never would have wound up with Howard Milstein."

WHO IS HOWARD MILSTEIN? FOR starters, Howard is a Milstein, which is a big deal in New York City. In 1919, Morris Milstein, a Russian immigrant, founded a company that joined in the city's real estate boom by installing the flooring in skyscrapers, including, eventually, the World Trade Center. From flooring, the family moved into real estate, building and owning residential and office towers in Manhattan and elsewhere. In 1986, the family bought Emigrant Savings Bank and built it into the country's largest privately owned, family-run bank. The Milstein family is now worth an estimated $5 billion.

The Milsteins, including Howard, are also litigious, including among themselves. Morris Milstein had two sons, Paul and Seymour, and in the '90s, their heirs spent a decade battling each other in at least four lawsuits over succession issues. The cases were ultimately settled in 2003, with Howard (Paul's son) retaining control of the Emigrant bank and the family real estate firm. Howard, who graduated from Harvard Law School and is now 71, also has a longstanding interest in sports. In the '90s, he was involved in plans, which never came to fruition, to create rival leagues to Major League Baseball and the National Football League. Later, after attempts to buy the Cleveland Browns and the (then) New Jersey Nets, Milstein did buy a controlling interest in the New York Islanders hockey team, but he sold the team after a rocky tenure that included lawsuits over a possible new home for the franchise. In 1999, he offered $800 million to buy the Washington Redskins, which was the highest bid for the team at the time. Still, the NFL owners didn't approve Milstein as

EVAN SCHILLER

The Design Legacy of Jack Nicklaus

By Derek Duncan

Jack Nicklaus was just six years into his professional playing career when he ventured into golf-course design in 1967. The course was Harbour Town Golf Links on Hilton Head Island where he consulted with then little-known architect Pete Dye. When it opened in 1969, its small greens, strict shot-shaping demands, long-strip bunkers and use of wood bulkheads represented a startling departure from the prevailing architectural style of the day. Dye and Nicklaus collaborated on four other courses before Nicklaus turned his attention to Muirfield Village with architect Desmond Muirhead in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Incorporated into an upscale real estate development, Muirfield Village earned immediate praise as an unabashed tribute to Augusta National with idyllic tree-lined fairways draped over natural grades, pristine turf conditions and risk-reward par 5s laced with creeks and ponds.

Nicklaus created his design firm in 1974, and the company made its first big marks with Glen Abbey in Ontario and Shoal Creek near Birmingham, Ala., another course conceived in the image of Augusta National that would eventually host two PGA Championships and a U.S. Women's Open (founder Hall Thompson was an Augusta National member). As his competitive playing schedule eased through the 1980s, Nicklaus became one of the profession's premier designers, scoring hits with Castle Pines in Colorado (1981), Desert Highlands in Scottsdale (1984), Loxahatchee in Jupiter, Fla. (1984), and Valhalla in Louisville (1986). A critique of this chapter of Nicklaus' portfolio was that he often built courses that only he could play. Nicklaus admits that early on he viewed course design with the same analytical outlook that had served his own game so well, often laying out holes that demanded extreme tactical and executorial skill and, frequently, high, left-to-right shaped shots.

Nicklaus Design exploded during the construction boom of the 1990s. The company, working worldwide, offered clients different tiers of products priced around Nicklaus' level of design and promotional involvement, and he began commanding million-dollar design fees for his Signature level of service that included exclusive design oversight and up to 10 or more site visits. Though the immense output of the decade yielded few highly ranked courses, Nicklaus, along with Tom Fazio, became the most bankable name in course architecture in terms of product prestige and real estate demand.

A turn to a more sympathetic mode of design with an emphasis on aesthetics helped the company achieve new heights in the 2000s. Alluring settings combined with increasingly sensual, accessible greens and a wider variety of recovery options enabled courses like Mayacama in northern California, Pronghorn Club in Oregon, Moonlight Basin in Montana and Spring Creek Ranch in Tennessee to rise in the rankings.

Meanwhile, The Bear's Club and The Concession in Florida and Sebonack on Long Island (designed with Tom Doak) proved Nicklaus could still ramp up challenge without sacrificing attractiveness. Because of the ongoing lawsuit, Nicklaus does not currently participate in projects under the Nicklaus Design banner, but the company remains one of the largest and most active firms in the industry with more than 50 projects underway internationally, including the recently renovated BallenIsles East course in Palm Beach Gardens where Nicklaus won his second PGA Championship and the nearby Panther National, a new course designed with Justin Thomas, opening this fall.

SIGNATURE JACK
The Reserve at Moonlight Basin in Montana opened in 2016 and ranks 176th on Golf Digest's Second 100 Greatest Courses.

> “ COULD NICKLAUS START DESIGNING GOLF COURSES ON HIS OWN, OUTSIDE THE COMPANY, AND PROMOTE THEM JUST WITH HIS OWN NAME? THE PLAINTIFFS SAY NO.

an owner, in part, according to news reports, because of his penchant for litigation. After withdrawing his bid, Milstein sued the previous owner of the Redskins for conspiring against him; he lost.

Milstein played golf as a kid, gave it up for tennis for a long time, then played a round on a lark in his early 40s and made a hole-in-one. Thus inspired, he picked up the game again and became a middle-handicapper. The Nicklaus-Milstein marriage had a honeymoon of sorts, which featured several rounds of father-and-son foursomes, including two at Augusta National. More importantly, when Milstein learned that Nicklaus was suffering from a rare cardiovascular condition, he arranged for immediate treatment with the leading specialist in the field, who was affiliated with the Milstein Hospital in upper Manhattan. (Like the Nicklauses, the Milsteins have a long history of philanthropy.)

In the 2007 deal, Milstein's Emigrant bank loaned $145 million to Nicklaus' company, which Nicklaus himself was allowed to take out in cash for his family. Going forward, the plan called for the company to take the first $12 million per year in profits to repay the loan, with any additional profits split between Milstein and Nicklaus. But the pair's business was buffeted by the Great Recession of 2008, which hit the golf industry especially hard. The design of new golf courses, which was Nicklaus' passion and the company's most important line of business, nearly ground to a halt around the world. The company had no profits to repay the loan from Emigrant, so the indebtedness to the bank compounded. (It's currently about $300 million.) The downturn lasted for much of the first five years of the two men's partnership, and Nicklaus wavered about renewing the deal in 2012, not least because he knew that it had been unprofitable for Milstein. “I felt like he hadn't had a fair shake, and he convinced me we could turn this around,” Nicklaus told me. However, for the second five years, the terms of their relationship changed in important ways. First, Nicklaus received more income—a cut of gross revenue rather than a slice of profits, which put his total remuneration from the Milstein deal at about $175 million. In return, Nicklaus turned over control of the Nicklaus Companies to Milstein.

This is where things really began to deteriorate between the two men. “After we signed this new deal, he got control, and his whole attitude changed. It was now, *I'm in control. This is what we're going to do.* I had virtually very little say with what was happening,” Nicklaus says. “Not that he was disrespectful, but pretty soon, it was pretty hard to live with it.” What's peculiar about Nicklaus' position is that he has a hard time specifying how Milstein made his life miserable. One of Nicklaus' complaints is that Milstein never once called him on the phone, which seems inconsistent with his belief that Milstein was also micromanaging him. Milstein had to approve all expenditures over $5,000, which annoyed Nicklaus, and this included use of the corporate plane, a beloved perk for Nicklaus and a critical tool for reaching his worldwide network of design projects. Most galling to Nicklaus, Milstein zealously guarded the company's control of the Nicklaus name, including its use by Jack's family. Nicklaus' four sons had always been closely involved in Jack's business and life, but Howard said Michael Nicklaus couldn't use the name “Golden Bear” at his real estate brokerage, and Milstein didn't want Gary Nicklaus to call an investment firm “Nicklaus Brown & Co.” or let it post a photograph of Jack and Gary on its website. (Howard Milstein declined to be quoted for this story.)

Milstein also made a series of additional investments in the golf business. He invested in Miura Golf, the Japanese club manufacturer, and bought Golf magazine and Golf.com (which compete with Golf Digest) and a pair of smaller tech companies, True Spec Golf, which is a retail clubfitter, and the app GolfLogix. Milstein folded his golf interests into a privately held firm called 8AM Golf, which was a part of his broader family empire. The Nicklaus Companies went from being Milstein's crown jewel to a subsidiary of a subsidiary.

Nicklaus stewed. He had to clear speaking engagements and golf exhibitions with Milstein, whom Nicklaus came to regard as a social climber. "What he wanted to do was have me take him to all my relationships and transfer them to him," Nicklaus says. "When I realized how he handled people, I didn't want him near my relationships." The feud even enraged Jack's wife. "Barbara is the sweetest person in the world and never said a bad word about anybody—except one person," Nicklaus says.

JACK
AUS
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WORLDS APART Nicklaus in the family office in 2022; Milstein made an unsuccessful bid for the Washington Redskins in 1999.

NICKLAUS IN 2022: JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES • MILSTEIN IN 1999: ALAN MOTHNER/GETTY IMAGES

MILSTEIN'S TEAM ALLOWED ME TO visit the corporate offices of the Nicklaus Companies, LLC, which is a surreal experience these days. Located in Palm Beach Gardens on (where else?) PGA Boulevard, the place looks like a shrine to Jack Nicklaus, not like the offices of a company that is suing Jack Nicklaus. The walls and tables are covered with photographs of the man (a few alongside Howard Milstein), memorabilia from his achievements, and displays of products bearing his name and image. Nicklaus had sold the company the right to use such trademarks as the "Golden Bear," and there is even a canned beverage called "Golden Bear Lemonade." The employees sound like shellshocked children of a bitter divorce who hope to remain on good terms with both parents. Nicklaus had an office at the Nicklaus Companies until October 2017. "He came in and cleared out his office over a weekend—every piece of furniture, every picture on his wall," one current employee recalled. "When the secretaries came in on Monday, they started crying because they thought the company was closing down."

It wasn't, but Nicklaus was trying to extricate himself from Milstein, which became evident in a bizarre incident relating to, of all things, the Ukraine scandal that led to President Donald Trump's first impeachment. Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman were businessmen who claimed they were doing Trump's bidding by scheming with Rudy Giuliani to persuade the government of Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden. When their names surfaced, Trump denied knowing the men. In response, Parnas released an audio recording that he had surreptitiously made of a fundraising dinner with Trump in April 2018; the tape suggested that the President endorsed the pair's efforts in Ukraine. (Taping the dinner was at least inappropriate, if not actually illegal; Parnas and Fruman later pleaded guilty to campaign-finance violations.) Jack Nicklaus III, Nicklaus' grandson, happened to be seated at the same table as Trump, Parnas and Fruman at the dinner. (Jack Nicklaus has long been a friend and political supporter of Trump.) At one point, Trump turned his conversation with Jack III to the subject of Howard Milstein, whom the President knew from New York real estate circles. "How did you do with Milstein?" Trump asked, "How's that going?" Jack III replied, "My grandpa, he's 78 years old, and he doesn't need to deal with that kind of ego." Later, Trump said of Milstein, "It's exhausting, because I know him. I know the guy."

At the end of Nicklaus' second five-year deal, he chose not to renew, but he did not leave the company altogether. Nicklaus announced a "retirement" from the Nicklaus Companies, but he continued designing courses under the company banner. Over his full career, Nicklaus has designed about 300 courses around the world; those bearing the "Jack Nicklaus Signature" imprint are those he worked on most closely, and they commanded the highest prices. Over the next few years, Nicklaus recruited some of his friends in business as intermediaries to try to sort out the relationship with Milstein, to no effect. (In these discussions, Milstein proposed at one point that he would pay Nicklaus $3 million per year for the rest of his life; after Jack's death, the company would

> “A LARGER TRUTH SEEMS CLEAR: TWO INDEPENDENT, HEADSTRONG ALPHA MALES GREW TO LOATHE ONE ANOTHER—AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN PREDICTED FROM THE START.

then pay Barbara Nicklaus $2.5 million per year for the rest of her life; then after her death, the five children would receive $400,000 per year for the rest of their lives. Jack and his family rejected the deal because it would leave them intertwined with Milstein in perpetuity.) Except for the course-design work, Nicklaus had less and less to do with the company. By 2022, Scott Tolley, who had been a kind of all-purpose aide to Nicklaus for many years, had left the company and gone to work for Nicklaus as an individual. Milstein threatened to sue Tolley if he continued to work for Nicklaus, and he demanded that Nicklaus and Tolley cut off contact with each other—which Nicklaus regarded as “an attack on me and a further attempt to control my life.” In response, on May 3, 2022, Nicklaus sent Milstein a letter severing all ties to the Nicklaus Companies. He also filed for a private arbitration in Florida, designed to sort out his and Tolley’s rights under their contracts with Milstein’s company.

Three days later, Milstein responded by filing the *Nicklaus Companies, LLC v. Jack W. Nicklaus* lawsuit in New York state court. “Despite being paid an enormous sum,” the complaint stated, Nicklaus “acted in bad faith, wrongfully diverted opportunities to the detriment of Plaintiff’s business and willfully engaged in activities damaging to the brand and other intellectual property owned by the Company.” The real assault, though, came in another part of the document, which landed like a 2-iron swung at Nicklaus’ forehead.

BY THIS POINT IN 2022, THE BIG story in golf was the effort by the Saudi-backed LIV Tour to pry luminaries of the game away from the PGA Tour by paying them enormous sums of money. The game’s traditionalists, as well as those offended by the Saudi regime’s human rights record, led the resistance to LIV. The controversy had little to do with the Nicklaus-Milstein dispute, but in a demonstration of the bitterness between the two men, Milstein used the case to make a damaging accusation: that Nicklaus had wanted to take the Saudi’s money and become part of the LIV Tour—but Milstein had stopped him. According to the complaint, Milstein “essentially saved Mr. Nicklaus from himself by extricating him from a controversial project that could have not only tarnished his legacy and reputation, but severely damaged the Nicklaus Companies’ name, brands and business.” Milstein’s claim received wide attention in the golf world.

Nicklaus regarded this accusation as a flagrant lie and an especially damaging one. He noted, for starters, that Milstein testified that he had warned Nicklaus off the project face-to-face “in a meeting in the boardroom” of the Nicklaus Companies; in fact, the board meeting in question took place over Zoom. As for the connection to the new league, Nicklaus told me he did meet twice with Saudis who were involved with creating the LIV Tour but only because he was designing a pair of golf courses for them in Saudi Arabia. In their first meeting, the visitors, including Yasir Al-Rumayyan, a leading figure in the Saudi economy, brought up the new league, and Nicklaus said he had never heard of it. Afterward, he called Jay Monahan, the commissioner of the PGA Tour, who warned Nicklaus off the project. In the second conversation, where his son Jack II was also present, Nicklaus Sr. told me that the Saudis made him an offer to become a partial owner of the new league. “They said, ‘We will name the trophy the Jack Nicklaus trophy, and we think this company could be worth north of $100 million,’ and I said, ‘Guys, I can’t do this,’ ” he told me. Nicklaus informed the visitors that he would remain loyal to the PGA Tour, which he, Palmer and Gardner Dickinson had co-founded in 1968. “They changed it from $100 million at the meeting to $250 to $500 to $750 million, while they were talking to me,” Nicklaus told me, “I wasn’t paying attention to it because I wasn’t interested. But my son Jack said they came off the 100 and went to 750.” Afterward, Nicklaus wrote Yasir Al-Rumayyan a letter, dated May 17, 2021. “Your Excellency,” he wrote, “By accepting your offer I would be turning my back on what I created and have championed.” (Nicklaus sent a copy of the letter to Monahan, who keeps it on his desk.)

In short, according to Nicklaus, Milstein’s complaint falsely portrayed him as greedy and disloyal to his fellow PGA Tour golfers. All that was left was for Nicklaus and Milstein to face off in court.

THE THREE DAYS OF TESTIMONY last fall before Justice Joel M. Cohen amounted to a preliminary skirmish in what could be a long legal war. Milstein (that is, the Nicklaus Companies) wanted a preliminary injunction to stop Jack Nicklaus (the person) from using the Nicklaus name commercially or designing any more courses except for the company. In front of the judge, both sides tried to look reasonable. The Milstein forces said they had always been deferential to Nicklaus. John Reese, the former chief executive of the company, testified that “Howard was over the moon to be a partner with Jack. I mean, who wouldn’t be? Howard went out of his way to be kind to Jack. He was a cheerleader the whole time.” Cross-examining Nicklaus, Gary Malone, a lawyer for Milstein, pointed out that Nicklaus couldn’t specify any complaints about Milstein’s behavior. “Isn’t it a fact that you cannot recall a single instance in which you proposed the company take some action and was turned down by a board of managers meeting?”

“I don’t think I ever proposed anything that was ever considered,” Nicklaus answered.

“But you can’t think of a time in which the board of managers turned down a proposal that you made, correct?”

“I don’t recall, actually,” Nicklaus said.

For his part, Eugene Stearns, Nicklaus’ lawyer, tried to make it seem that Milstein wanted to lock Nicklaus into a lifetime of servitude. “Your view is for the remainder of his life, you have the right to say, ‘Sorry, sir. You’re not

> “NOBODY CAN OWN ME—MY NAME, MY FACE,” SAYS NICKLAUS, 83. “SINCE NOVEMBER, I’VE BEEN BACK STARTING A BUSINESS AGAIN. I’M HAVING A BLAST.”

going to ever again be able to design a golf course or endorse a product unless I approve of it’; is that your view?”

Milstein filibustered in reply.

“Mr. Milstein, I don’t think you are listening to my question. My question is, is it your view that for the remainder of Jack Nicklaus’ life you have the ability to prevent him from designing golf courses or endorsing products unless you approve of his activities?” Not exactly, said Milstein.

What was striking about the contest was the relative triviality of the complaints each side had against the other. Nicklaus felt disrespected. Milstein felt that Nicklaus, outside the company’s auspices, discussed golf-course projects in Belgium and the Bahamas and considered an offer for a video game. In a broader sense, Milstein thought Nicklaus was ungrateful for his $175 million largesse to his family; Nicklaus thought the deal with Milstein prevented him from making $300 million by selling the company to a more congenial partner. A larger truth seems clearer: that two, independent, headstrong alpha males grew to loathe one another—as might have been predicted from the start.

The legal question in the case is what exactly Milstein bought for the $175 million to Nicklaus. “Trademarks and the right to publicity, including a name, can be sold,” Christopher Sprigman, a professor at New York University law school, told me. “If Nicklaus has transferred the right to use his name to the company, he could lose the right to use his name to independently design golf courses. It all depends on what the contract says.” The problem in this case is that “the contract” is actually hundreds of pages of separate agreements signed over 15 years, and their terms are, to use a technical legal description, a mess. What “the contract” says isn’t clear.

Cohen, an unusually savvy judge, has made several appeals for the septuagenarian plaintiff and octogenarian defendant to settle their differences, to no avail. Instead, on December 9, 2022, Cohen issued a preliminary order that amounted to a compromise of sorts. Nicklaus could continue designing golf courses, but he couldn’t market them with the trademarks he had sold to the company, like “Golden Bear” and “Jack Nicklaus Signature.” However, the order left a significant ambiguity. Could Nicklaus himself start designing golf courses on his own, outside the company, and promote them just with his own name? The plaintiffs say no; Nicklaus’ team says yes. A definitive answer might take years. The judge has scheduled depositions in the case to take up most of 2023, with a motion for summary judgment—that is, a dismissal before trial—to be filed in early 2024. Then, depending on the outcome of that ruling, a full trial would probably take place in 2025—with appeals to follow.

Nicklaus, befitting a man in his ninth decade, is not waiting around. “Nobody can own me—my name, my face,” he told me. “Since November, I’ve been back starting a business again. I’m having a blast.” He’s working with three of his sons, hiring some of his favorite employees from the Nicklaus Companies and looking for expanded office space. He was just back from a course site in Puerto Rico. “It was the most beautiful place for a golf course that I’ve ever seen. I can’t wait to put one there,” he says. “I don’t care if I can’t call the course the Golden Bear. It’s fine with me if they call it the Olden Bear.”

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BY DEREK DUNCAN - PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOM FURORE

Oak Hill's Makeover

THE LONG VIEW Sightlines across holes two (foreground), three and beyond were unimaginable before the East Course's 2019 remodel.

The PGA CHAMPIONSHIP WILL BE PLAYED AT OAK HILL IN Rochester, N.Y., in May for the fourth time, placing it second only to last year's host, Southern Hills. This might be misleading because no PGA Championship or any other major championship has been contested on the course the players will see this year. That course is gone. In 2019, the club orchestrated a near total remodel of the East Course by architect Andrew Green, 45, who in a short period has become one of the most consequential designers in the business. Through seven decades hosting various national championships, the Donald Ross-designed East Course has been an archetype of American parkland golf, a showcase of fairways threaded through robust corridors of hardwoods and deep rough, with sloping greens rising from nests of bright white bunkers. Though few individual holes stood out, Oak Hill's cumulative orchestration of trees, lush grass, shadows and perched putting surfaces provided a constant, green-noise backdrop for moments like Curtis Strange winning his second consecutive U.S. Open in 1989, the heartbreaking loss of the 1995 U.S. Ryder Cup team and Shaun Micheel's stuffed 7-iron to two inches at 18 to clinch the 2003 PGA Championship.

Yes, Green's work at Oak Hill changed its complexion entirely. He remodeled every green complex, fairway and landing zone to resurrect the original Ross character and spaciousness of the East Course that had been intentionally and unintentionally eradicated by 70 years of growth and architectural alteration. When Ross constructed the course in 1924 on mostly bare farmland (the property was already called Oak Hill, even though it had few trees), the holes were expansive with segmented, broad-shouldered greens and deep, scruffy bunkers. Green's renovation moved Oak Hill back toward this complexion by reclaiming fairway widths and, through the removal of thousands of oaks, elms, maples and other varietals, opening up sightlines across the property unimaginable a decade ago when Jason Dufner held off Jim Furyk during the last PGA Championship played here. Three new holes were also built, and Green found more than 200 yards of additional teeing space, bringing the championship distance to just shy of 7,400 yards.

Oak Hill hasn't been remodeled as much as it was reverse engineered to a state viewers and most players won't recognize. The driving accuracy and shaping of shots around the boughs of trees so requisite to previous scoring will not be critical this time, though avoiding fairway bunkers and their tall vertical edges will be. High-trajectory approaches over bunkers and water blocking the fronts of greens were *de rigueur*, but most entrances now have been lowered and the hazards spaced to the flanks. Even more dramatic are the course's new aesthetics that are based on historic photographs, with aggressive, steep-faced bunkering casting stark chiaroscuro shades against more exposed putting surfaces and horizon lines.

"There's a certain rugged kind of boldness to what we've done that's meant to provide a little more intimidation and to place some demanding circumstances on the world's best players," Green says. "The bunkers are certainly deep and steep, and there will be some fairway bunkers where, if golfers end up in them, they won't be able to advance the ball all the way to the target. That may cause some of the professionals to have some questions."

Why did Oak Hill embark on such a radical journey away from a presentation that epitomized for many what a major-championship venue should be? Why change a course that has never fluctuated beyond 11 and 27 on Golf Digest's America's 100 Greatest ranking?

The answer begins in 1968. That's the year Lee Trevino tied the U.S. Open scoring record of 275 at Oak Hill. In an era that valued strenuous golf above all else, having a course that was perceived as too easy is what kept prominent clubs up at night. Not only had Trevino, just a second-year tour player, matched the Open's lowest score, but he shot four rounds in the 60s, a feat never before accomplished. Fearing the governing bodies would overlook a presumably lax East Course for future majors, Oak Hill hired player-turned-architect George Fazio and his partner-nephew Tom Fazio in 1976 to toughen up the East Course. "One thing that Oak Hill never presented to the great players was a really intimidating hole where you could make a big score," a club official said at the time. "You can bogey any hole, but we never had a hole that was a double-bogey or triple-bogey threat."

To get those triple-bogey threats on the card, the Fazios shuffled Oak Hill's layout and created several new holes. Before the 1968 Open, Ross' sixth hole, a quaint par 3 encircled by six bunkers, was taken out of play for congestion reasons and replaced by a longer but blander par 3 on the property's previously unused northeast corner, beyond the fourth green (this became the fifth hole). The Fazios, in turn, abandoned that 10-year-old replacement par 3, then broke Ross' long par-4 sixth (as it was numbered at the time) into two holes: the mid-length par-4 fifth with a small, elevated green nestled over a crook in Allen Creek; and the sixth, a mid-length par 3 with another small, elevated green that dropped off left and long into the same creek. They also built a new par-3

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DIG IT OUT OF THE DIRT Andrew Green is known as a hands-on designer and researcher.

15th, shifting the green well to the right and adding a pond, and moved the 18th green forward away from the clubhouse.

The additions helped Oak Hill land the 1980 PGA Championship and, as requested, made the East Course more severe—at least to everyone but Jack Nicklaus, who won by seven strokes and was the only player under par. However, the new holes were out of place with the rest of the design. Most of the membership thought they debased the course.

Nevertheless, Oak Hill continued with this permutation until after the 2013 PGA when deteriorating green conditions prompted exploration into another renovation. This time the remediation of the Fazio holes was also on the docket, and the club asked Jeff Sluman, the 1988 PGA Championship winner and Rochester native who was intimately familiar with the East Course, to weigh in on their reconstruction. The architecture committee then sought proposals from top architects and renovation specialists, and at the urging of superintendent Jeff Corcoran they also interviewed Green, a relatively unknown designer who had just left McDonald & Sons, a golf-construction company, to go out on his own. The Oak Hill job represented a rare opportunity for the young architect, and Green dug in.

"The selling point for Andrew versus all those other individuals was the presentation he gave for the architecture review committee," says Dr. James Mason, a member since the early 1980s. Green's proposal went beyond improvements and reviving lost holes. Using vintage imagery and Ross' diagrams and field notes, he demonstrated, hole by hole, how far off the intended program the East Course had strayed. Oak Hill had been one of Ross' most ambitious designs, 36 holes (with the adjacent West Course) that he envisioned would be played in a variety of loops and configurations. Building it was an industrial feat requiring, according to newspaper reports, 165 laborers, dozens of teams of horses, six tractors and a couple of steam shovels to cut hills and mold the land. Green demonstrated how that ingenuity and expressiveness—and even some of the hazards—had been covered up in foliage, and how the greens and bunkers had regressed to a repetitive succession of saucers and ovals. The result was a course that encouraged a plodding and patient mode of golf that had grown increasingly linear in proportion to the course's age. Green's roadmap for restoring the Ross fundamentals opened eyes. "Within a very short window of time everyone looked around the room and said, *This is our guy*," Dr. Mason says.

The Oak Hill project didn't begin until 2019. In the intervening time, Inverness, another Ross-designed major-championship course in Toledo, Ohio, also hired Green. Like Oak Hill, Inverness had suffered a similarly panned renovation by George and Tom Fazio in the late '70s that interjected several modernized holes into the classic layout. What began there as a basic bunker renovation became a full-scale remodel when Green asked the club officials if they would consider reworking the misfit Fazio holes with

REUNITED
The long par-4 sixth has been restored to Donald Ross' original conception.

STEEP AND DEEP The rolling par-4 12th showcases Oak Hill's pernicious bunkering.

the rest of the course back into a style sympathetic to Ross. Green's work at Inverness was widely lauded, and the renovations there and at Oak Hill helped inspire other past major-championship clubs like Congressional, Scioto and Wannamoisett to hire him to undertake their own transformative, historic-based remodels.

Green's rise to the top of the profession has been both long and meteoric, and perhaps surprising. Most designers, if they aren't playing professionals or staked with a prominent family name, take a decade or more working small jobs before they are established. This was true for Bill Coore, Tom Doak, and Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner, who are Green's chief rivals for the most prestigious renovation jobs. Green seemed to arrive on the scene having bypassed the hardscrabble, hand-to-mouth phase, but that obscures the reality that he spent 14 years honing all aspects of the craft for McDonald & Sons, who hired him out of Virginia Tech.

Green remodeled EVERY GREEN COMPLEX, FAIRWAY AND LANDING ZONE TO RESURRECT THE ORIGINAL ROSS CHARACTER AND SPACIOUSNESS.

"It was evident back then that Andrew was one of the smarter guys we had been around," says McDonald & Sons president and CEO John McDonald II. "He can see in his mind's eye the design he wants, the shape and the philosophy, and he can put it into a plan. The other part that not many have is the ability to get on a machine and put that idea in the ground."

Green belongs to the family of architects who not only design holes but operate equipment—excavators, bulldozers and sand pros. Those who have worked with him commend his efficiency, organization and technical expertise, but seeing the architect shape his creations gives added confidence to the clubs that hire him. Though he has yet to design and build a new course, he's an exhaustive researcher who can expose clubs, even in interviews, to particulars of their history they didn't know or had forgotten. His skill in presenting a comprehensive vision of how great their courses can be, often in ways they haven't conceived, has been critical to his success in landing such prominent renovations. His greatest skill may be inspiring clubs through his passion to appreciate their courses more deeply than before.

"He was one of the most humble people we interviewed, and he said to us, *You have a national treasure here. It's in the ground, and I'm just here to help you uncover it*," says Chris Brooks, a member who was instrumental in hiring him at Scioto where Green's work has been as staggering in scope

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STAR TURN Green has become one of golf's most consequential designers in a short time.

MATT HAWTHORNE

> 'There's a certain RUGGED KIND OF BOLDNESS TO WHAT WE'VE DONE THAT'S MEANT TO PROVIDE A LITTLE MORE INTIMIDATION.'

as it was at Oak Hill. "It was almost like an archeological dig for him. He went about it in such a different way than others we talked to. He was more interested in our history and uncovering what Ross intended here than anybody else."

"You could sense his love of golf-course architecture, his love of the final product," McDonald says. "He's a very compelling orator when he's talking about the golf course, and there's a confidence level to what he does without projecting an air of cockiness."

Proposing to clubs as established as Scioto, Inverness or Congressional that they consider moving off their current iterations and essentially rebuild something new demands extreme confidence but also intuition.

"Every inch of dirt mattered to him," says a source close to the remodel of Congressional, where Green turned the club's heavily wooded Blue Course, host of three previous U.S. Opens, into a proto-1920s landscape of rolling meadows and fescue transitions with 18 reimagined holes. "Nobody else saw moving the 10th hole to where it is now. Nobody else had the connection pieces."

What Green saw at Oak Hill was a design that looked like an avatar of what happens to courses as they age, especially courses that revise themselves under the auspice of remaining relevant to the modern professional and elite amateur game.

"My initial thought was that the property was an all-star and that the original Ross routing was spectacular," Green says. "He had done a phenomenal job of creating interesting golf shots and utilizing fairly simple but inspired topography. The opportunity to restore most of the routing was there."

That began with recreating the holes that had been altered in the 1960s and '70s. The area where Ross' short par-3 sixth was located could not be used because of through-traffic limitations and proximity to other holes (the green was located where the current seventh-hole tee complex is). Green took Ross' drawings and rebuilt a replica of the par 3 in the location of the defunct par 3 that had been built for the 1968 Open (the club was using that corner of the East Course for short-game practice). The attractive new 180-yard hole plays as the fifth and sits prominently with a multilevel plateau green circled with four bunkers.

Adding the new fifth meant that Ross' old fifth, once considered one of the country's great par 4s before the Fazios cut it up into two holes, could be rebuilt. Green extended the putting surface of the Fazio fifth to its former location where the par-3 sixth green had been and reshaped it to Ross' specs. The new sixth hole, a stout 500-yard par 4, now resembles the hole that Ross initially built with Allen Creek splitting the fairway 75 yards short of the green (instead of directly in front of it) and continuing up the left. Though he wasn't able to move the par-3 15th green back to its 1925 home, 25 yards left of where it currently is, Green did rebuild it in the likeness of the Ross green, with two bunkers protecting the front and one running the length of the putting surface on the left. He also filled in the pond—that area is now a recessed chipping area sitting well below the tabletop green.

Oak Hill's par-70 East Course will still be defined by its

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THE LAST STEP Oak Hill's difficult, fate-making 18th hole.

stellar par 4s, including the restored sixth and the long closing trio of 16, 17 and 18. The course has some intriguing short par 4s, too, including the stylish uphill second with a blind, narrow green set above deep trench bunkers, the 12th that plays through a gauntlet of bunkers to a putting surface benched into a sharp hillside, and the dramatic 320-yard, uphill 14th that will entice players to attempt to drive the green, though misses short will leave them in bunkers well below the putting surface, and shots that go over the green are likely to roll off the property.

All the remodeling work makes Oak Hill a more diverse and interesting course than it was, one that allows players to be more aggressive off the tee than in the past but requires careful calculation hitting shots into the greens.

"I think Oak Hill is an all-time driver's golf course, where the fairways are typically 26 to 28 yards wide, and you're seriously out of position if you're in the rough," says Sluman, who played in the final group with winner Jay Haas in the 2008 Senior PGA Championship on the East Course. The winning score that year was seven over par. "You really have to drive the ball straight," he says, "even though off the tee there's more room now to swing a ball left to right or right to left."

Green preserved the interior contours of most of the putting surfaces but recaptured green space around the perimeters, squaring off many of the edges the way Ross had. Greens like one, three, eight and 11 have tantalizing corners, lobes and appendages, meaning that flags can be moved to a greater range of locations than they had previously (some greens had so much build-up around the bunkers that they were down to just two or three hole locations). If he chooses—and depending on course conditions that can be cold and blustery in Rochester in May—PGA of America chief championships officer Kerry Haigh can stick holes in little nooks and near bunker faces, daring players to take on the shot. "The front left pin on nine is going to be amazingly difficult to go at because you're shooting uphill, and looking into the horizon it doesn't even look like it's on the green," Sluman says. "It's going to lead to a lot of bogeys if guys start going for it."

The new dynamics give Oak Hill's membership more freedom to play, to hit a variety of shots and recover. It should also prove an entertaining test for the professionals, who will be tempted to flex their muscles. If the remodel helps the East Course get back to crowning champions like Nicklaus, Trevino and Cary Middlecoff (winner of the 1956 Open) and their 27 combined major titles like it used to, the club won't have to do anything more to entice the USGA or PGA of America to come back.

Let's cru

EXPLORING THE MEDITERRANEAN WITH CLUBS IS THE GOLF ADVENTURE

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YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

BY MAX ADLER • ILLUSTRATIONS BY KLAUS KREMMERZ

My idea of the perfect golf trip is unoriginal and goes something like this: four or eight buddies travel to the famous links of somewhere—Scotland, Ireland, maybe Oregon—pack full rain gear hoping not to use it, play 36 every day, then every night recharge with a substantive and sedative blend of beef and alcohol. Repeat. The style and comfort of any accommodation or transit is immaterial. It's all about how much great golf can we cram in before returning home to our spouses, children and freshly depleted accounts of domestic credits.

With this prejudice I received a novel invitation to go on a "golf cruise." Costa, the Italian cruising company whose ships run occupancies as large as 6,500, was launching a new package to coincide with Rome hosting its first Ryder Cup in 2023. Participants would play Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, the venue built for the Cup that several golf industry cranks predicted (wrongly) wouldn't be finished in time, then sail counterclockwise around the Mediterranean Sea, stopping to play golf in Savona, Marseille, Barcelona, Mallorca and Palermo.

To say nothing of ambitious logistics, the spirituality of the voyage seemed confused. Isn't the mega-convenience sought by cruisers at odds with whatever golfers are after? Fast greens, thick rough, quirky hazards—we're deviants who like just the right amount of pain. Not that I'm against the idea of kicking back on a chaise lounge with a beverage in hand watching a watery horizon slip between my toes, but add to this golf, plus the obligation to somewhat absorb the cultural gifts of one of the great seats of civilization, and, well, it all just seemed like too big a meatball.

Then again, I'd never once set foot on a cruise ship in my life, so what did I know? During the height of the pandemic, along with many others I had predicted (wrongly) this was one industry doomed for extinction. I've also held "touristy" as one of the worst words in the English language and usually go out of my way to avoid things and places that are popular, often to the detriment of my party. It also turns out the concept of a golf cruise isn't entirely new. Perry Golf started running expeditions along the coasts of the British Isles in 1997. After some learning experiences, president and co-founder Gordon Dalgleish thinks the formula they've now honed partnering with the cruise line Azamara is on-point. Itineraries vary across the world, but a classic trip might connect Donegal, Royal Portrush, Portmarnock, Royal County Down and Adare Manor in 10 days. More often than not the ship would have just a few hundred people, and with such intimacy comes a premium price tag.

But as far as bringing golf clubs aboard the big volume ships that compose the heart of the tourism market, I could fancy myself a pioneer. *So what the heck*, I thought. Because none of my regular golf buddies are people I wish to sip Chianti with over electric candlelight, I asked my wife. She who plays at most nine holes per annum was skeptical, too, thinking I was tricking her into a golf trip by decorating it with everything else she really likes. When I promised we wouldn't play golf at every port, she was in. With our four young kids and Prozac-prescribed Bernedoodle at home, my wife and I rarely get away together—or if you ask her, never.

WHEN THE TRIP COMMENCED WITH CHECK-IN AT Marco Simone and our tour guide was as surprised as we were to learn we were scheduled to play only nine holes instead of 18, I chuckled. Not trying to score a cheap point, but if you know the joke about the European nightmare being organized by the Italians, laugh with me. Kindly, the golf shop started us on No. 10 so that we could experience the side where future Ryder Cup dramas would climax. Built on rolling farmland, the broad-shouldered holes are amply designed to accommodate spectators and drain water down to fairways. The rough was (and allegedly always is) as healthy as arugula salad to favor the straighter-hitting Europeans. The tiered and curvaceous greens and the predominance of half-par holes (easy birdies, hard pars) should make for charged match play. Though the course was conceived for 24 of the planet's best golfers, its future will be about attracting middle-handicap tourists from Rome to subsidize its private membership. No one mentions golf much when they talk about pleasure travel in Western Europe, but maybe they'll start.

Jessica's favorite hole was the short par-3 13th, where from the most forward tees she skulled a 9-iron out-of-bounds long into the backyard of a charming pink stucco farmhouse covered in ivy. Playing nine left ample time to savor the sensational eggplant parmigiana and bacon rigatoni in the new clubhouse that was so under-furnished that it echoed, and our guide was pleased that we would arrive at our ship well before it could take off without us.

To define "us," with the exception of myself and one other writer and her plus-one, our intrepid group of 20 were all travel industry professionals eager to learn about the golf-cruise concept. Thus, it's helpful to partially define a golf cruise as a number of people who fit comfortably on a bus. A tour might be a single large group, or patched together from various foursomes, twosomes and singles. It's a manageable sub-group of people apart from the hoi polloi of the main ship who do things together like dine, disembark, and collect their clubs for excursions. It's also a way to make new friends.

Our ship, the Costa Smeralda, was built in 2019, but because of the pandemic started sailing only in 2022. Twenty stories with swimming pools and a water slide on

When it's time to clean the exterior, the privacy barriers retract so that the ship can be scrubbed in fell swoops. As the writer J.C. Hallman once observed about the evolution of utopian thought, from Atlantis to about Star Trek, "A range of authors, architects and engineers first identified paradise as a floating island, then an island accessible by ship, and finally as the ship itself. Transport became destination." So far, I couldn't disagree.

It takes two days for Smeralda's central bank of elevators flanked by stairs to become easy to navigate. On the first night we stuck close to the extroverted Laura De La Horra, a Cuban-born travel advisor for Cruise Planners, who demonstrated great leadership with the digital wine list when QR codes and funky Wi-Fi thwarted the rest of us. A veteran of more than 50 cruises after a first career as a controller for a national trucking company, she knows how big systems work. The vaguest outline of another cruise ship in the distance was all she needed to call out its name. As freely as she discussed the relative values of inclusive packages across cruise lines, she could cite their godmothers and godfathers, too. Modern cruise ships are mostly christened by pop celebrities—Pitbull, Katy Perry, and Kelly Clarkson each have performed the honors with a champagne bottle—and it turned out the godmother of Smeralda was the homonymous Penelope Cruz.

After dinner that first night, our group attended a function billed as "Drinks with the Captain." Although Captain Carmine Maddaloni didn't have a drop, we did our part to render the statement factual. It's possible I overestimated Maddaloni's interest to hear about the time I attempted docking my father-in-law's 24-foot Sea Ray, and all hell broke loose. When I asked if this social affair was distracting his command, he grinned and slyly pulled out an iPhone from his gold-buttoned navy lapel. The music mixed with nearby conversations made it hard to hear exactly what the captain said, but the impression was he controlled the 1,105-foot, 180,000-ton ship through an app. Then the person next to me asked if all golf-cruisers would receive the sleeve of Costa-logoed golf balls in their cabin upon check-in as we did. Yes.

I awoke thinking I was in a hotel room, then pulled the curtain. The sight of rippling seawater is a surprise that

> IN THE SAME WAY OTHER GROUPS DISEMBARKED TO VISIT A VINEYARD OR TO GO SCUBA-DIVING, WE PLAYED GOLF.

the top deck, and within her belly all manner of restaurant, bar, lounge, club, spa, retail outlet, theatrical stage, casino and a gym, she took two years and $950 million to build. The custom inlays of tile, woodwork and lighting fixtures would make any contractor go agape, and my impression was Las Vegas with life preservers. Smeralda runs on liquified natural gas and can switch over entirely to electricity in equipped ports, placing her in the highest echelon of energy-efficient cruise ships in the world.

When we first boarded, in Civitavecchia, Rome, we breezed through the giant dockside terminal in minutes. As soon as we zipped away our passports and proof of COVID-negativity, Jessica and I were clinking Proseccos on the private balcony of our cabin, wearing sunglasses. Of the 2,612 rooms on board, two-thirds have a balcony.

never subsides. Each ancient port city of the Mediterranean has a distinct skyline, and our arrivals were always timed with sunrise and the first dockworkers being up to receive us. Our cruise director, Scott Knutson, a Chicagoan-now-Floridian with a long career in the cruise industry, had a corny but inarguable line about the mode of travel: "You relax; we'll change the scenery." One morning coming into harbor we had a primo view of a crane unloading a commercial freight ship. I thought how much our four-year-old son would have been thrilled to see the heavy equipment in action, but more so about how nice it was not having him there.

> EACH PORT CITY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN HAS A DISTINCT SKYLINE, AND OUR ARRIVALS WERE ALWAYS TIMED WITH SUNRISE.

Breakfast is a scene. Occupying both the port and starboard of Deck 8 is a symmetrical layout of stations devoted to coffee, pastries, fruit, grains, omelettes, eggs, bacon, and on and on, all fresh and delicious. I never saw things escalate to full battle, but make no mistake, you are tactfully maneuvering against light infantry of couples and families speaking a variety of languages. Be warned that beautiful European women of a certain age and entitlement are all remorseless line-cutters. Only five percent of Costa's customers are American, which for me, stills any waves of agoraphobia. There's something fun and cosmopolitan about watching the old Scandinavian man ahead of you in line get testy with a young barista from the Philippines as he tries to explain how he likes his cappuccino in Spanish, which he regards as his best linguistic crack at Italian. Or when you're sharing an elevator with an extended family from Romania with matching Boss fanny packs, ready for their big day of cathedral ruins, and you're dressed for golf, and everyone is smiling warmly thinking how ridiculous the other looks.

Golf Club Garlenda is an hour drive from the port of Savona. If you start to feel trapped inside the tour bus, look out the window at the scrolling vineyards and remember those grapes could be your table wine in a decade. We'd almost switched venues in an emergency, when the evening before our operative relayed that Garlenda might not have enough carts. Quicker than a snap hook, my hand shot up to volunteer Jessica and me to walk and carry. (I hate riding. Plus, part of my constant entreaty to my wife to like golf has always been it's essentially a hike through nature, which she loves. For the record, I'm a staunch supporter of people enjoying the game in whatever manner they wish, be it with carts, music, alcohol, shirtless, in yoga pants, a live goat carrying their golf bag like a pack mule—yes, that's a thing.)

However, my vision of strolling the fairway-foothills of the Ligurian Alps was thwarted. Overnight, magical Pinocchian strings had been pulled and waiting for us at Garlenda was a fleet of 10 all-terrain vehicles with fat tires, yellow and red body trim, meaty suspension coils, deep multi-chambered dashboards for storage, electronic controls, and firm racing seats. Their futuristic look was incongruous with the crumbling flower pots and barrel tile roof of the clubhouse archway, but so would have been a Ferrari.

As a solution to a misunderstanding not made clear, we had to start on hole No. 11, the distant route to which was a not-obvious set of turns down a steep cinder block path, across a trafficked road from a blind start behind tall hedges, along a gravel path to a bridge, and through a rugged patch of Cypress grove. The design of our vehicle was not superfluous.

Garlenda has hosted 17 professional tournaments in its history, including the 1971 Italian Open. Built in 1965 and tipping out at only 6,654 yards, its routing is inventive. High-terraced tee boxes, twisting doglegs along domestic tomato gardens and fruit trees, and fences of varying height and material gave us the sense of being in an Italian hill village, which we were. Several holes on the back nine crossed over the same concrete irrigation canal, which was bone dry from an arid summer. The people in our party who griped loudest about the thin turf conditions also happened to be the weakest golfers, and within this first hour was the strongest secondhand embarrassment I'd feel on the trip. As we would encounter elsewhere, Mediterranean golf culture is walking with pushcarts and having a drink after the round, whereas more Americans opt for riding and maybe a tipple of swing oil during. To eschew local customs is fine, but being a rude guest is something else. In defense of my fellow travelers, they were perhaps viewing the course through the lens of the expectations of their future clients who would be paying $150 to $250 per green fee, which includes transportation and lunch, depending on various packages. (The more people in a tour group, the lower your price and the greater your options of courses. Also note: Whether you book directly from a cruise line or through a travel agent, you usually pay the same. Agents purchase cabin nights at a bulk discount, which they then mark back up. The benefit of an agent is that in the likely event you need to make changes, it's one phone call.)

As is usually the case, bad feelings about course conditions washed away in the end. Our 19th hole continued merrily with smuggled bottles of local Menabrea beer on the tour bus. As parting gifts, the head pro handed us each a hardcover copy of the club's 50th anniversary book, of which there had obviously been too many published in 2015. The opening page features a cartoon monk standing over a knee-knocker, intoning, *Taci o se parli di qualcosa che sia migliore del silenzio*. Translation: "Unless you have something better to say than silence, shut up and let me putt."

FRANCE'S GOLF SAINTE BAUME MIGHT HAVE THE worst set of par 5s in the world, which shouldn't be a deterrent. On the contrary, to behold their unique grotesquery is worth a visit. The lowered green of the first hole is blocked by trees and plays scary short. At No. 7, unless you know to hit a big hook, the blind tee shot leads to certain marshy death, and the shallow green is perched 80 yards atop a steep burnt slope of rough where no round object will find a perch. The 12th isn't bad except for the cross burn that takes driver out of your hands and the electric fence down the left that shocked my playing partner when he retrieved his errant tee shot. The 15th is a blind drive over the same diabolical slope as the approach at No. 7, and here the aiming pole can't nudge you left enough. Luckily, I pulled my tee shot into the right rough (that's not a misprint; I'm right-handed), which bounded across and down not one, but two elegant stone walls leaving only a 9-iron in, which I hit to eight feet and missed.

Jessica liked the course for its varieties of trees, flowers and butterflies. With all of its character and eccentricity, the course, I was surprised to learn, wasn't built 100 years ago but 35. My other great learning was the true value of the cart with a beginner. Even for those who love taking walks, the easy zip of the accelerator prevents a round of tops and runners from feeling like a slog, the shoulder straps a prisoner's yoke. In the idyllic countryside and weather of the Mediterranean, it's never a bad time to sit out a hole, enjoy the view and ponder tomorrow's golf outfit.

One of our favorite fellow cruisers was Evelyn Gruber, a golf-travel specialist from Austria. She could be The World's Most Interesting Woman if a beer company ever decided to run such a campaign. Decades ago, she nearly died from snakebite when she was living in the Amazon rainforest with a photographer boyfriend. Certified as a skiing and fitness trainer, she has climbed several of the world's high peaks. She has stories from medical school, lifeguarding, and mentoring kids in Africa. She has been on several golf cruises, including one in which she had to brace her clubs tightly against ocean spray as they motored a Zodiac dinghy ashore to Nova Scotia from an expedition ship.

"It's all about correctly managing expectations," Evelyn says about golf cruises. "There's a difference between cruisers who want to play golf and hardcore golfers who want to experience the cruise concept." She thinks the value and flexibility of the Costa package is tough to beat—the cost of a cruise with four rounds can be as low as $2,000 per person, or even $1,500 if you're traveling with a group of 11 or more—and will appeal to women golfers, couples and certain segments of male golfers. "I do believe that there's huge potential for the Costa Golf concept contingent upon improving operations, logistics and service, especially when targeting the American golfer." Never quite like this had a cool, older woman made me feel like such a snowflake.

Although established golf-tour operators might turn up the volume on service—you'll never touch your golf bag until the first tee and foursomes are thoughtfully prearranged—our golf had the more casual air of a shore excursion. In the same manner other groups disembarked to visit a museum or a vineyard or go scuba-diving, we played golf.

TAKING A WEEK OFF FROM WORK, KIDS, LIFE IS AN opportunity to reset on many levels, including physical. Even if we had walked every round, I still would have made the hollow resolution to use the gym every day. Smeralda's exercise space on Deck 16, with floor-to-ceiling glass overlooking the sea, was inspiring in pictures, but in the end, I went exactly twice and not for impressive lengths of time. Our flow of days tended to have us leaving for golf shortly after breakfast and returning close to cocktail hour. *C'est la vie*.

In hindsight, we should have skipped Real Club de Golf El Prat. Four rounds in a week is probably the breaking point for a married couple with divergent enthusiasm toward golf. Jessica suggested we drink Sangria and dance in the cobbled streets of Barcelona while I prattled back about the history of this course that Golf Digest once ranked as high as No. 4 in Spain. Founded in 1912, the club was forced to relocate in 1954 when the city expanded, then again in 1997 when a new airport was built. The third property—likely the last—has two championship courses designed by Greg Norman and counts Sergio Garcia and Pablo Larrazabal as members. The country's most famous golfer, Seve Ballesteros, passed away the week the club hosted its ninth of 10 Spanish Opens. Showcases inside the clubhouse are filled with old-world treasures, like an antique chalk line putting-practice aid. Such history prepares you for hard and pure championship golf where you can't take a shot off—unless you're Jessica, and you take off the entire back nine.

> FOUR ROUNDS IN A WEEK IS PROBABLY THE BREAKING POINT FOR A MARRIED COUPLE WITH DIVERGENT ENTHUSIASM TOWARD GOLF.

The next day in Mallorca, while the rest of our group bussed to the Jack Nicklaus-designed T Golf Palma, Jessica and I took a cab to a remote beach. The salt content of the water here is so high that you see it harvested in white piles for sale. I'm a weak swimmer, but with the buoyancy boost from the salt I felt like I could doggie-paddle a triathlon. The other notable element of Mallorca beaches are the roving masseuses who offer 10-minute sessions for 10 Euros—a no-brainer. Because of a miscalculation in how long it would take to hail a return cab, we were not the last people to board Smeralda but the second to last. In cruising, when you miss the ship, it's on you to sort airline tickets or hitch a ride on a freighter to catch up at the next port.

In Palermo we skipped golf again, and spent the morning hiking Monte Pellegrino to find the Sanctuary of Santa Rosalia. The other reward from this holy summit is a panoramic view of Palermo, where that day the dominant feature was, without question, our white cruise ship. In the afternoon, we rented a single scooter to explore the city's cafes, galleries and traffic circles. If you don't want to look like a tourist, wear a smartly fitted suit and spend a chunk of the day smoking cigarettes and sipping espresso streetside.

Will the 2023 Ryder Cup ignite a new wave of golf interest in Italy and the surrounding regions? Time will tell. Would I recommend a golf cruise? If you're interested in compromise with a slightly less golf-mad partner, absolutely. These are not the greatest courses in the world, nor will you cram in all that many rounds, but it's an adventure that crosses borders where you unpack and hang your golf shirts only once. Going by the long-term forecast in the Mediterranean, you won't need rain gear.

As we bid goodbye to our cabin to head home, I witnessed a small gesture that filled my heart with hope. At the last possible moment, Jessica made room in her suitcase for the complimentary sleeve of golf balls. Ⓖ

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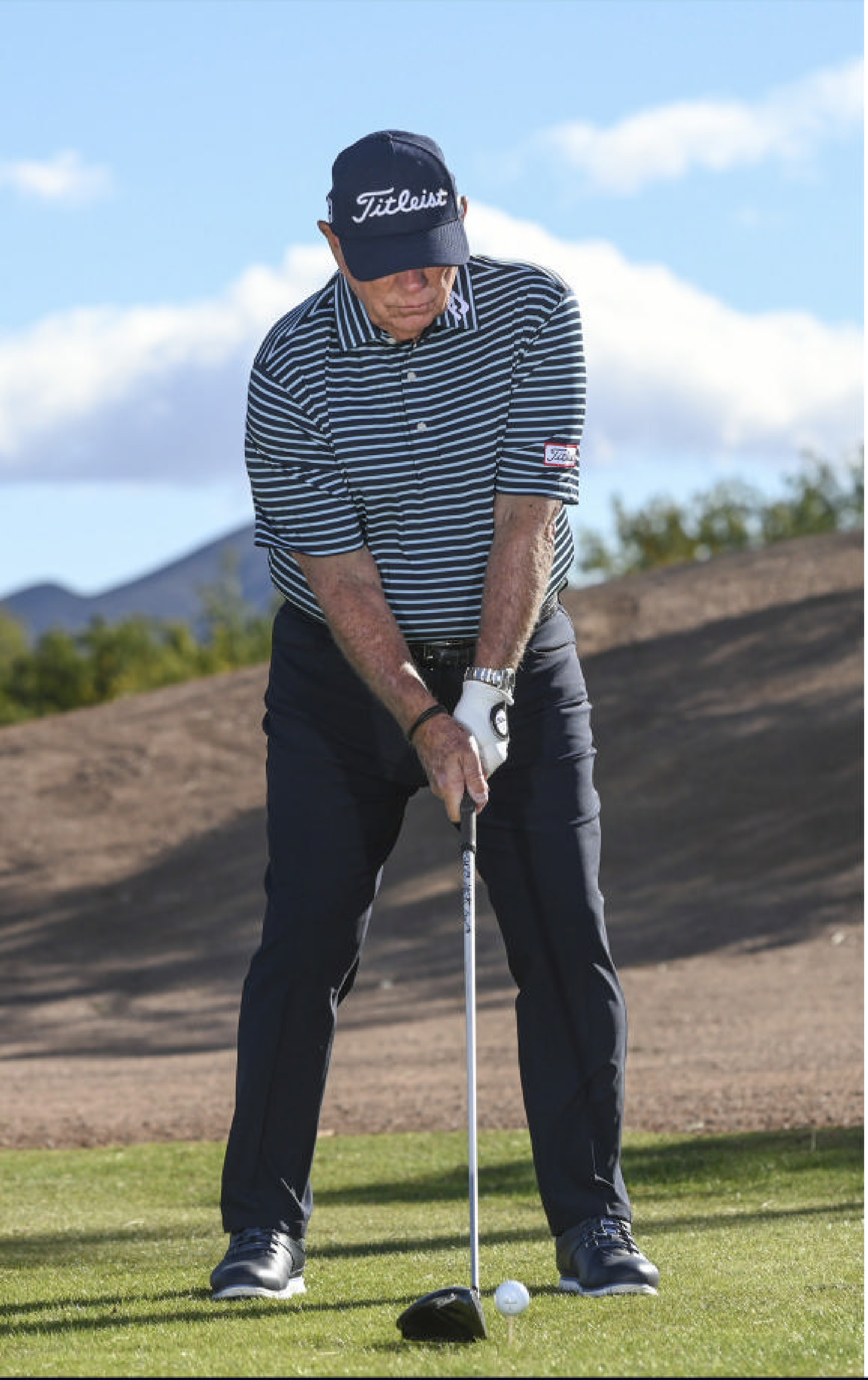
FIX IT FOREVER

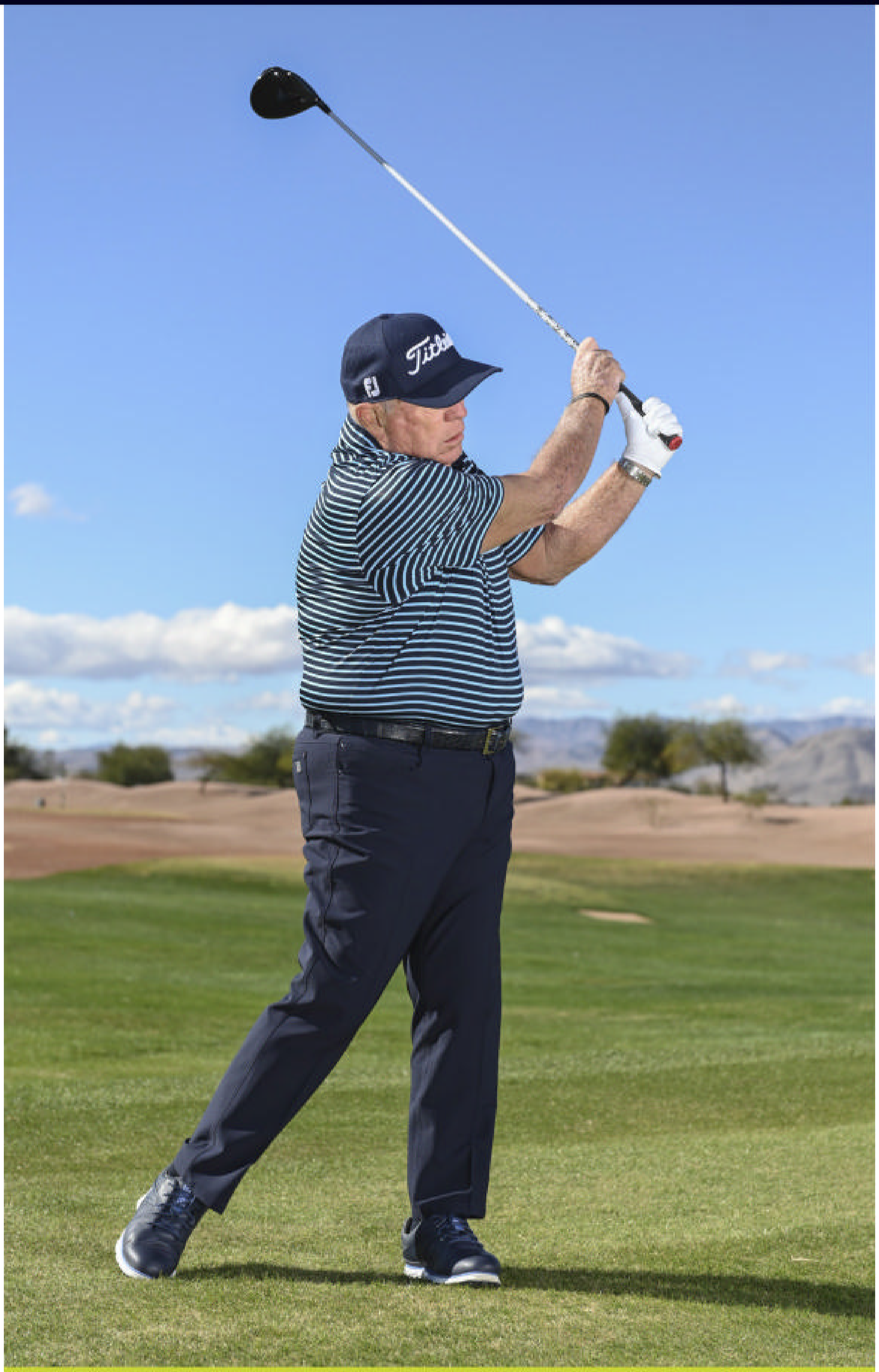
HOW TO SURVIVE 6 COMMON FAULTS ON THE COURSE AND ELIMINATE THEM FOR GOOD WHEN YOU PRACTICE

FAST FIX

Golfers who fight a slice try to pull the ball in the opposite direction to give it more room to curve and stay in play. As a result, they play the ball too far forward and twist their shoulders open at address, with the trail arm straight and rigid. These moves don't work because they make you cut across the ball, and the more you do that, the more open the clubface is to the path—and the bigger the slice.

If you're a slicer, do the opposite on the course. Move the ball back in your stance so it's a few inches inside your front heel, and set your shoulders square or even a touch closed. Your spine should be tilted slightly away from the target, and your trail arm nice and soft (*below*). When you swing, stay behind the ball and let your arms swing past you through impact. That's how you prevent a slice from dominating your day.





FOREVER FIX

When you have time to practice, here are a couple of slice-busting drills. First, the split-hands drill: Separate your hands on the grip, like a hockey player, and make half-swings back and through. Notice how your lead arm folds as you go through and your trail arm rolls over (*above*).

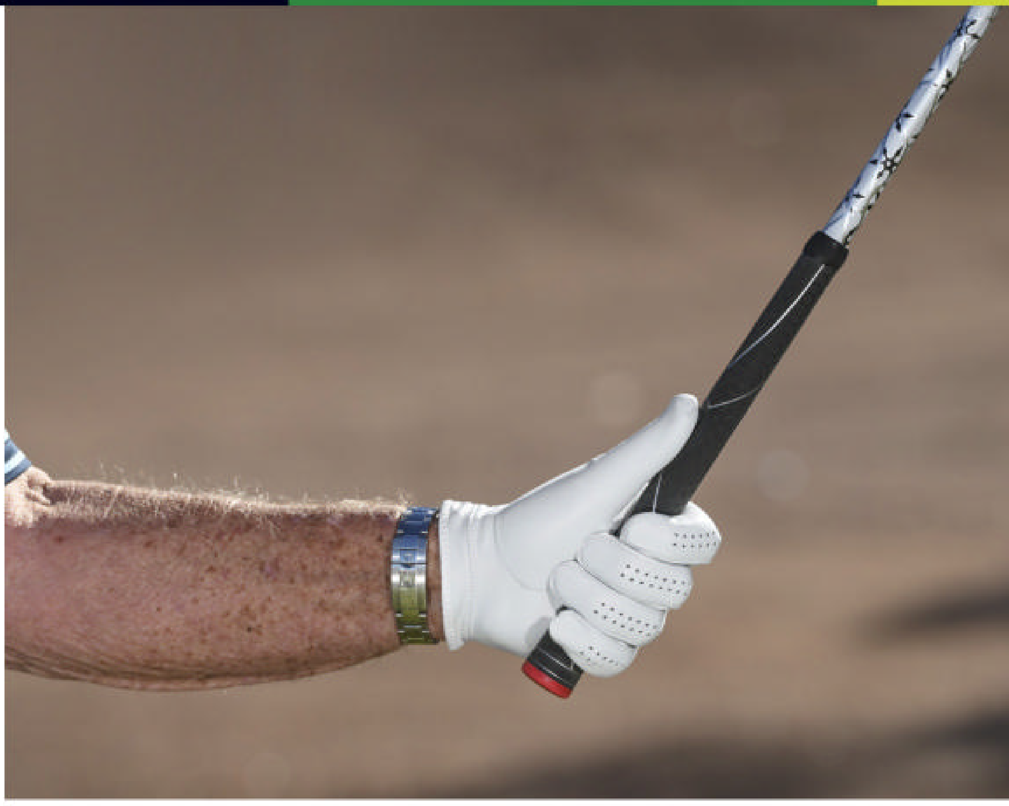
Another great exercise is simply making swings like you're holding a baseball bat. Slicers have a tendency to drag the grip through the shot, and waist-high baseball swings train the arms to rotate as the club passes through the hitting area. Always alternate drills with hitting balls normally, trying to transfer the feel from the drill into your regular swing.

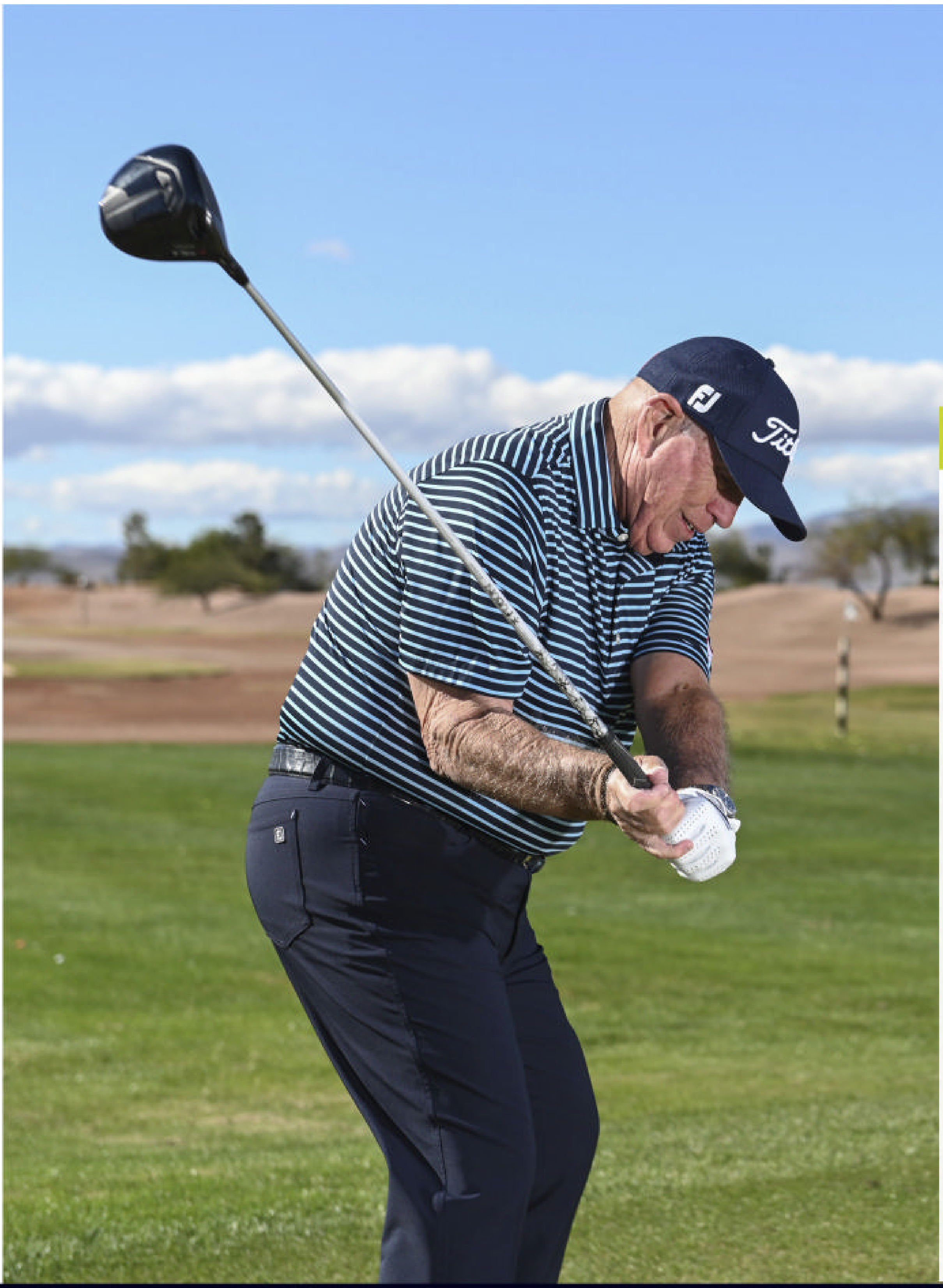
Remember to be vigilant about your setup with the driver—ball back a little, head back, trail arm soft—because if you get the release right but don't fix the setup, you're only doing half the work.

FAST FIX

Like slicers, players who want more distance do something to correct the issue that ends up backfiring. They grip the club all the way at the end, even with the cap of the handle slightly in the palm of the top hand. That might feel powerful, but the handle will tend to shift in the hand at the end of the backswing. (If you have a wear mark in the heel of your glove, you're guilty!) When the grip shifts, you have to regrip it as you start down, which casts the club away from you, straightening your arms and wrists too early, throwing away your power.

The simple on-course fix is to grip with your top hand so about an inch of the club is showing (*right*). Then, put most of your grip pressure in the last three fingers of that top hand, and keep it constant throughout the swing. That'll help you maintain some club lag on the downswing and produce more acceleration through the ball.

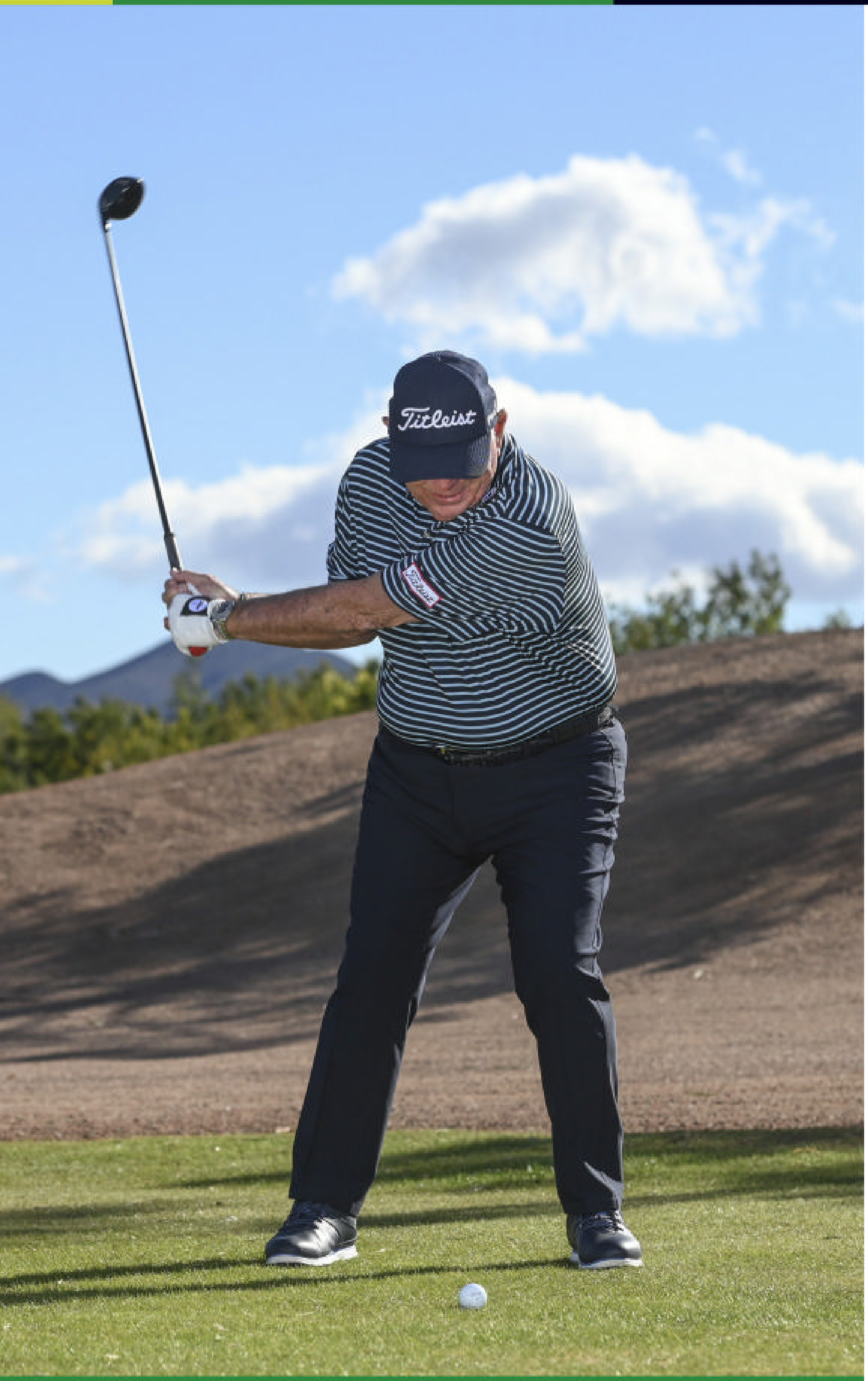




FOREVER FIX

Back on the range, work on getting comfortable hitting balls with your new choked-up grip. Obviously, it makes the club slightly shorter and lighter, so pay attention to your setup positions and swing tempo. Start with slower swings, but build up to full speed, making sure you're catching the ball in the middle of the face—the No. 1 key to getting the most out of whatever speed you can generate.

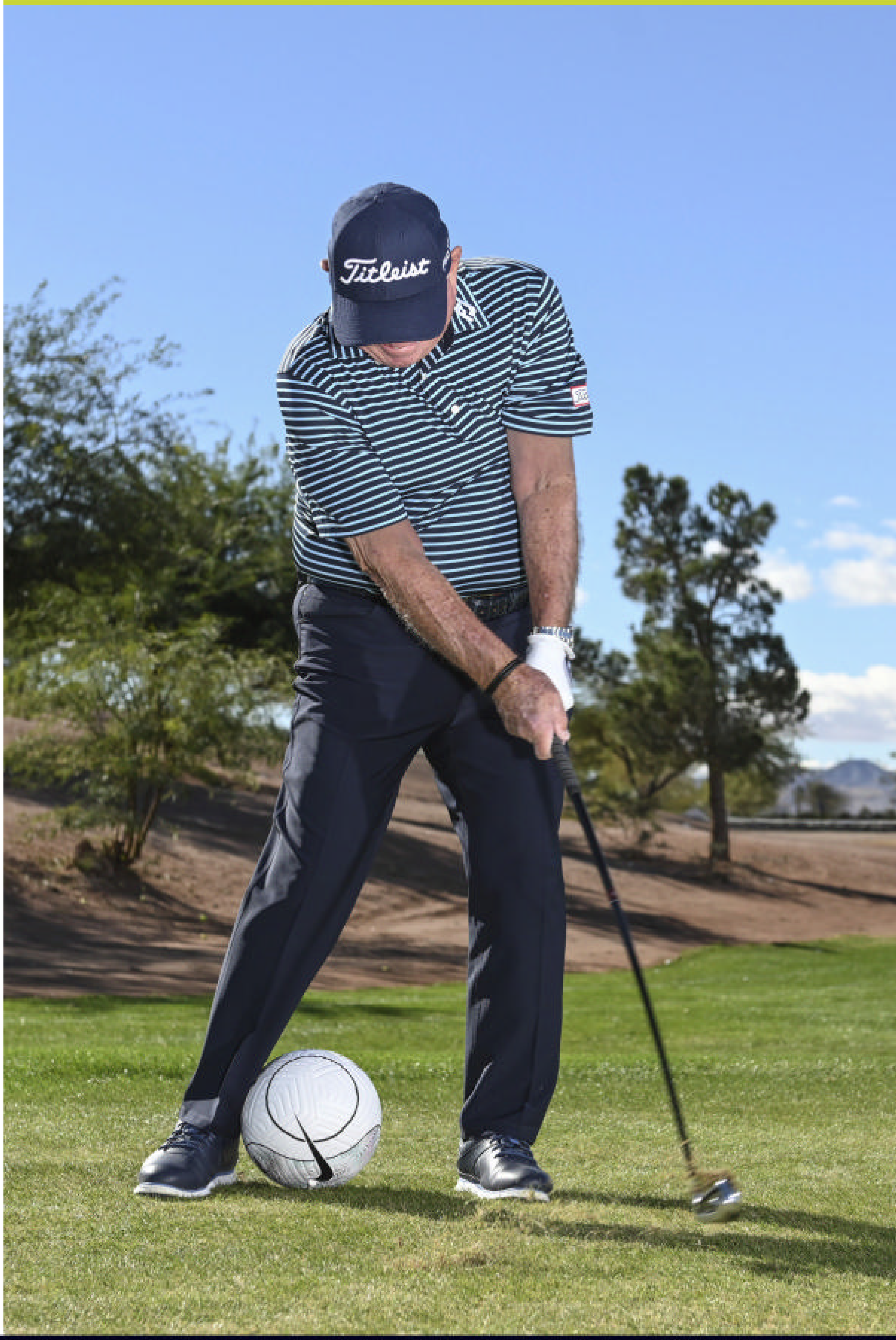
Next, use the pump drill, one of my all-time favorites. Without a ball at first, practice swinging to the top and pumping the club halfway down to feel the wrists staying fully hinged. That's the lag (*left*). Pump the club down and back to the top two or three times before swinging through normally. You can hit some balls this way, too, and then intersperse regular swings with the training to start ingraining the feel of more lag and more speed at the bottom of the swing.



FOREVER FIX

■ The hang-back can be a nasty habit, so it'll take some reps on the practice tee to retrain your body to go forward. One great way to force the issue is the step-through drill: Take your normal setup, swing to the top, and as you swing down step toward the target with your trail foot. This exaggerates the forward shift through the ball. Gary Player famously used to swing like this in competitive rounds, getting his whole body through the ball to maximize his power.

One more technique to check that you're moving forward is to key on the lower body. Set up with a volleyball or soccer ball against the instep of your trail foot, and make swings applying pressure to that ball on the downswing (*below*). Feel that your chest is "covering" the golf ball at impact, and to do that, you have to get your lower body driving forward and clearing the way.



FAST FIX

■ Modern fairway woods and hybrids, with their head shape and low center of gravity, do a great job of helping the ball launch high and carry far. But a lot of golfers still have the instinct to try to help the ball into the air with these lower-lofted clubs. On the downswing, they hang back on the trail foot and flip the club at the ball. The clubhead bottoms out too far back and bounces off the ground and into the middle of the ball. Hence the term "drop-kick." No fun, as we all know.

The best way to fix this fault is to focus on moving your chest forward as you start down (*above*). I like players to make slow-motion practice swings to really feel whatever they're trying to do. If you can't do it slow, you can't do it fast. So use time between shots, when you're waiting to hit or walking down the fairway, to simulate that forward shift on the downswing.

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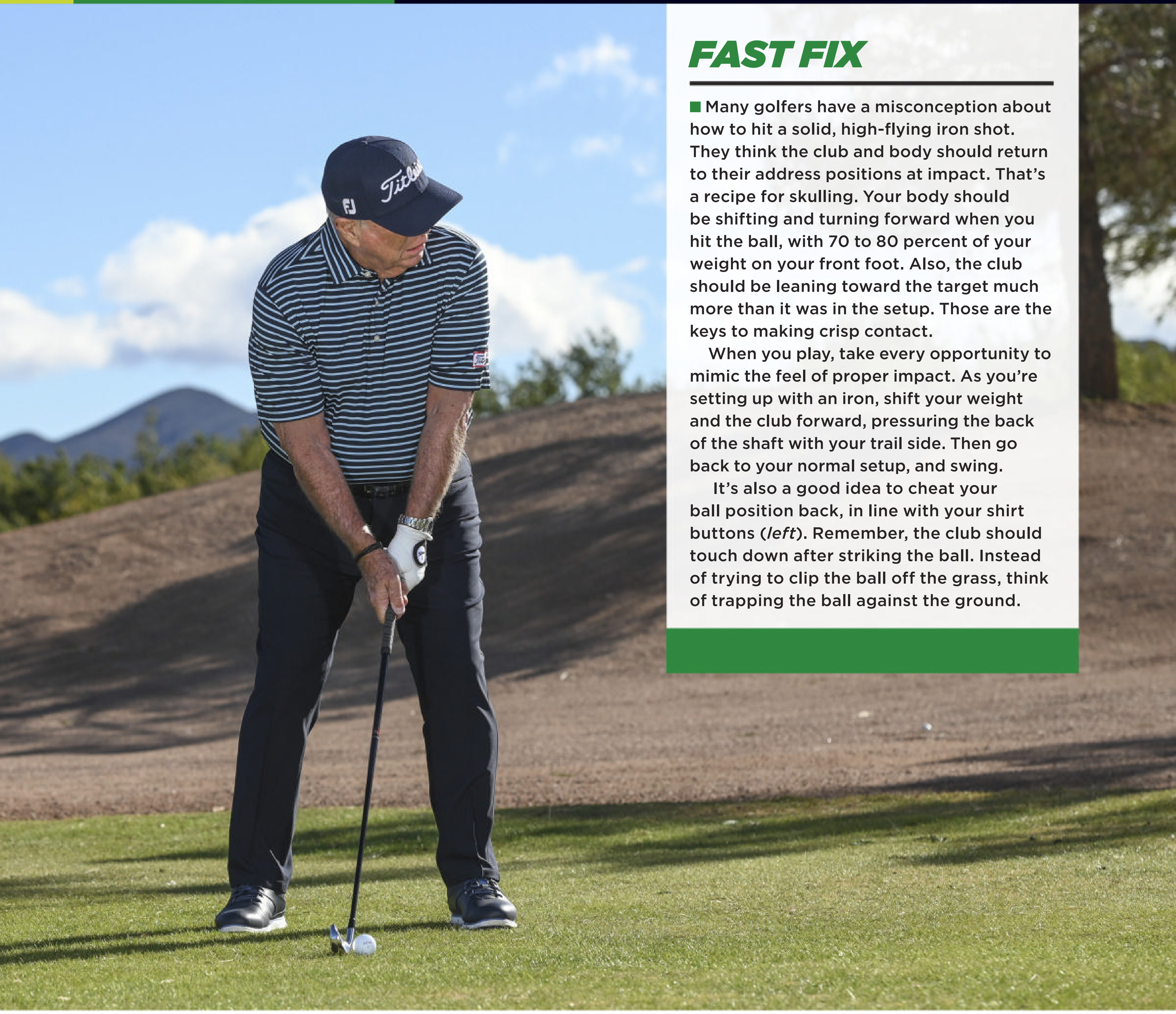


FAST FIX

Many golfers have a misconception about how to hit a solid, high-flying iron shot. They think the club and body should return to their address positions at impact. That's a recipe for skulling. Your body should be shifting and turning forward when you hit the ball, with 70 to 80 percent of your weight on your front foot. Also, the club should be leaning toward the target much more than it was in the setup. Those are the keys to making crisp contact.

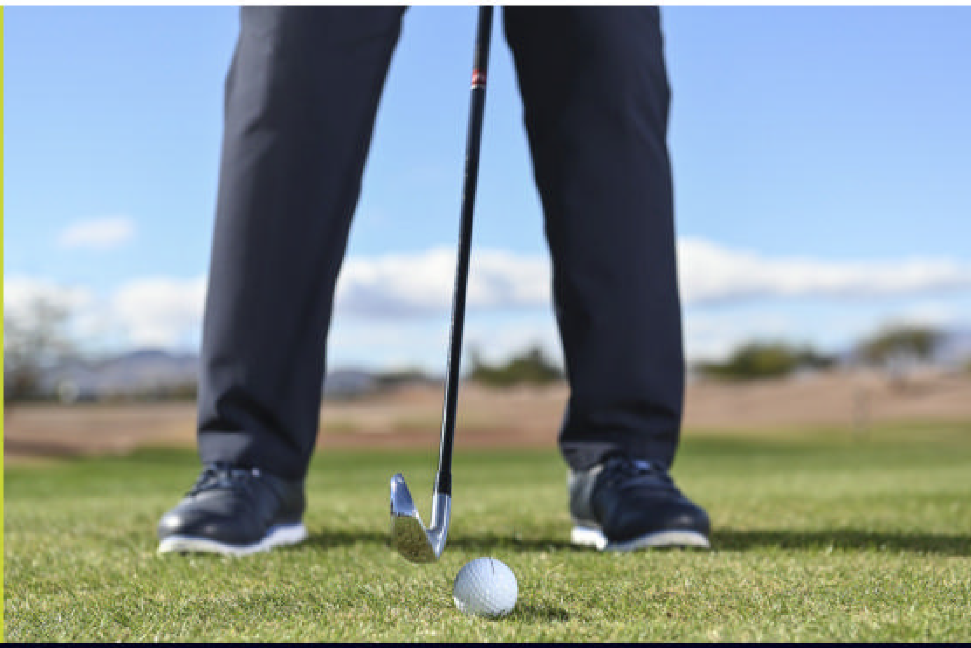
When you play, take every opportunity to mimic the feel of proper impact. As you're setting up with an iron, shift your weight and the club forward, pressuring the back of the shaft with your trail side. Then go back to your normal setup, and swing.

It's also a good idea to cheat your ball position back, in line with your shirt buttons (*left*). Remember, the club should touch down after striking the ball. Instead of trying to clip the ball off the grass, think of trapping the ball against the ground.

FOREVER FIX

Hitting the ground after the ball is a feeling that a lot of players have to get used to, but it's what all great ball-strikers do. One drill I use with players almost every day is setting up with a middle iron, then lifting the clubhead so the leading edge is level with the top of the ball (*right*). To catch the ball solid from that starting position, you have to hit down and through, or else you'll thin it or even whiff it. This is strong medicine for skullers.

One question I get a lot is, how can you make the ball go higher by hitting down more? The answer is, hitting down creates solid contact. Every iron in your bag has enough loft to send the ball way up in the air. If you hit it pure, with the shaft and your weight forward, your iron shots will soar.



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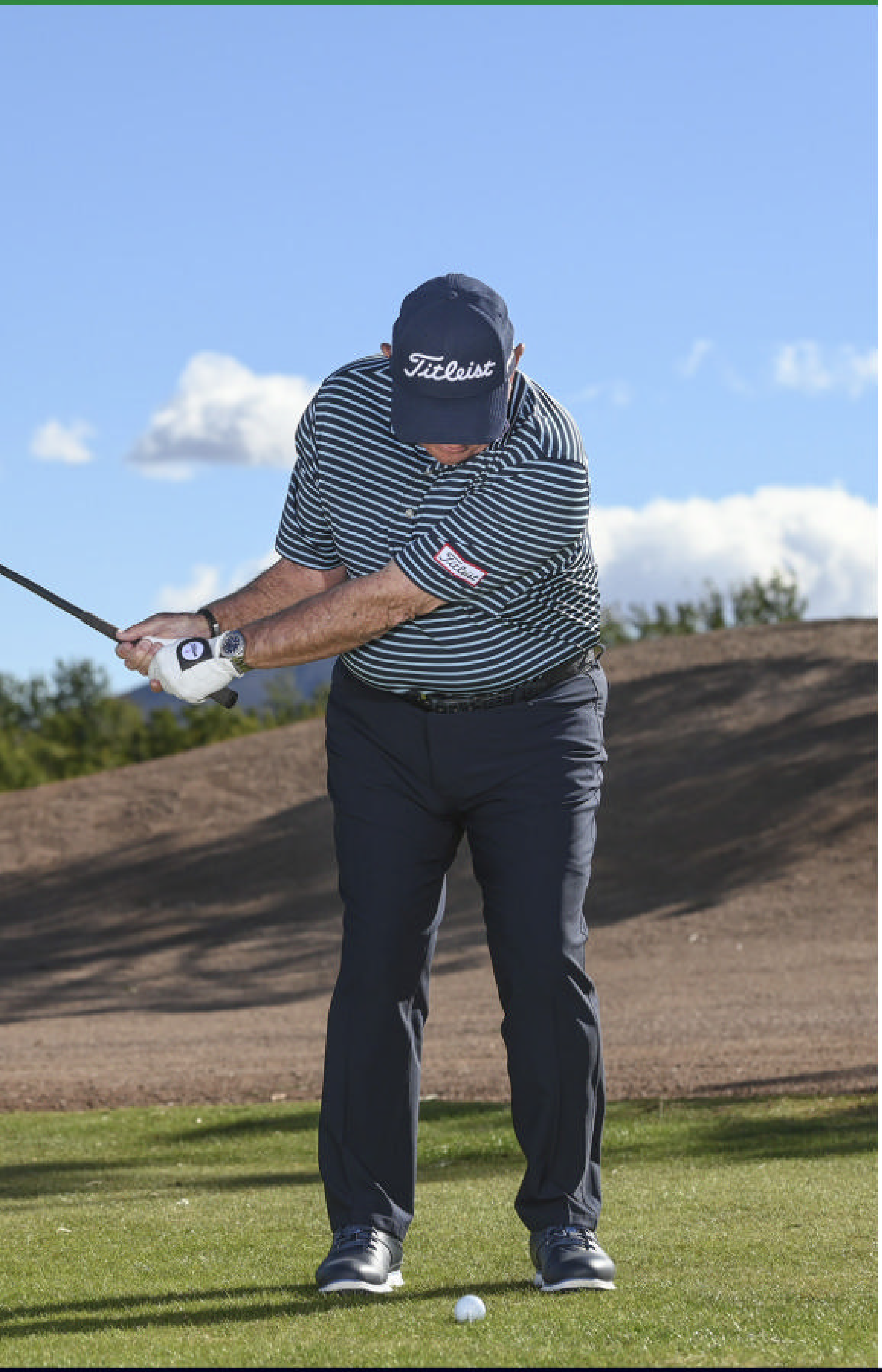
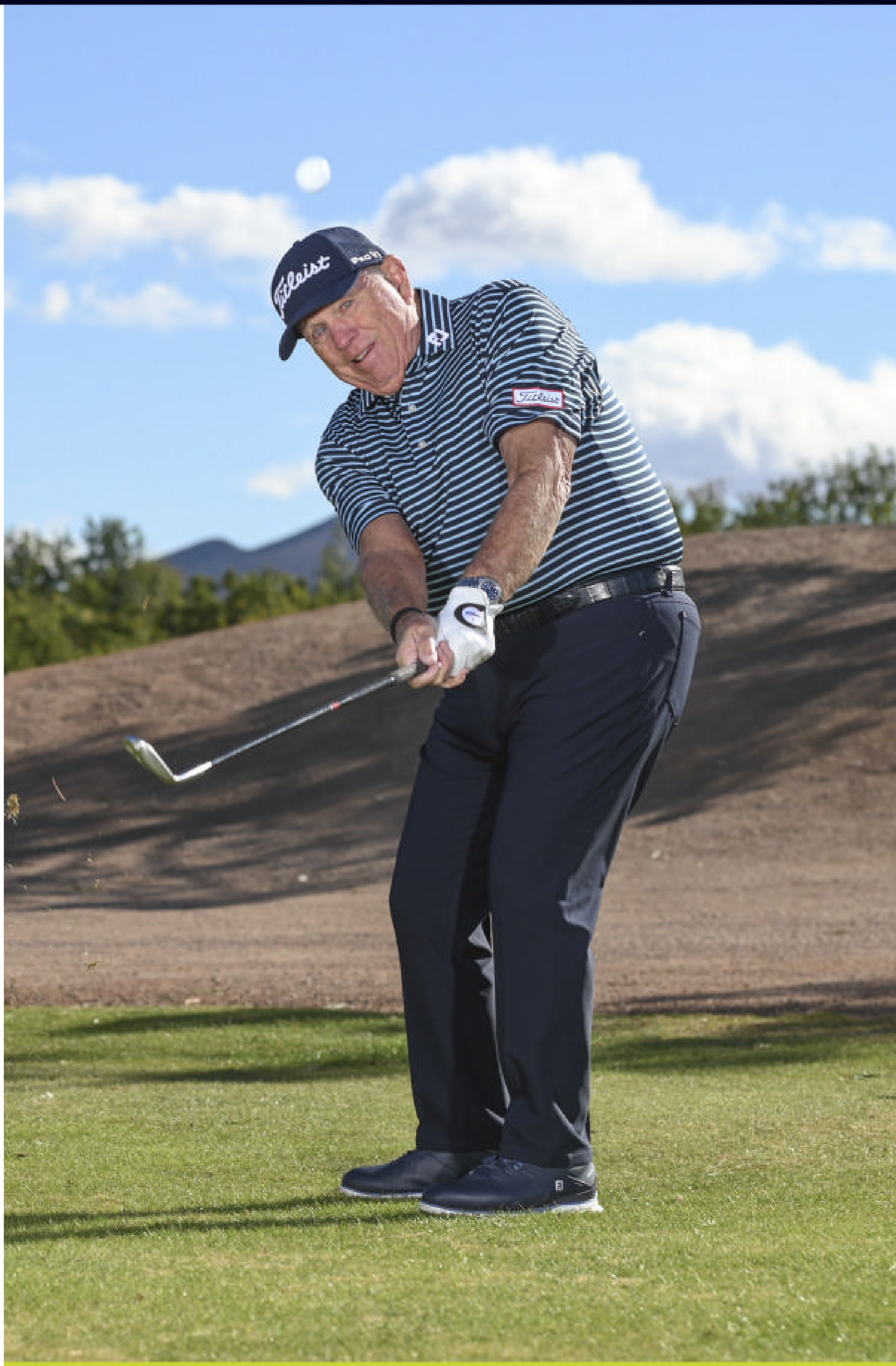
FAST FIX

■ When most golfers have a pitch shot of, say, 20 to 40 yards, they struggle with distance control—dumping it short or launching it over the green. There's usually one major fault here: a long backswing that forces you to slow down through the strike to try to manufacture the right distance. With that kind of guesswork, you're looking at unpredictable contact, and if you do catch it flush, unpredictable speed.

When you play, focus on making a shorter backswing with minimal wrist hinge (*below*), then turning your body to the finish. Don't rely on your hands and arms to create the shot at impact; set the backswing length with your arm motion, and then rotate your chest to face the target. You also can think about pushing through with your trail side, whichever clicks for you. Just think, *Arms back, body through* for better distance control.





FOREVER FIX

■ When you practice, spend time drilling that body rotation through the ball. Most golfers are so accustomed to a handsy swing on pitch shots that it takes some retooling to get the body moving in sync with the club (*above*). Hand action tends to produce a steeper impact; body turn shallows the path into the ball—so practice brushing the grass with the club, not digging and taking divots. You'll have to rotate your body to do that.

As your contact improves, distance control becomes a matter of trajectory. Experiment with different ball positions to learn shots for various hole locations. Play the ball back in your stance and lean the shaft forward to produce a lower shot that runs. Move the ball forward and set the shaft more vertical at address for a higher shot that lands softly. Develop those two pitching techniques, and you'll be able to get to any pin out there.

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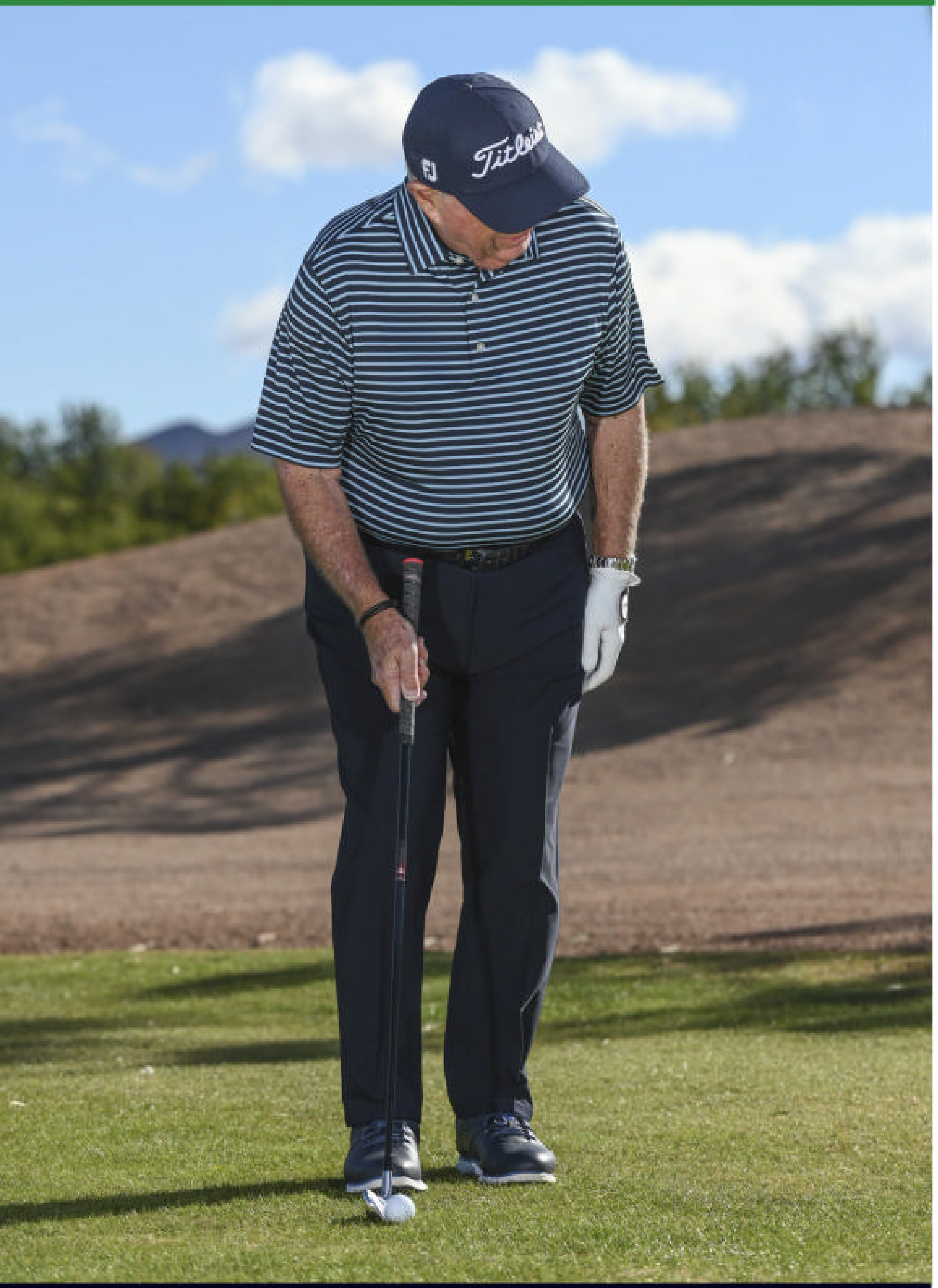
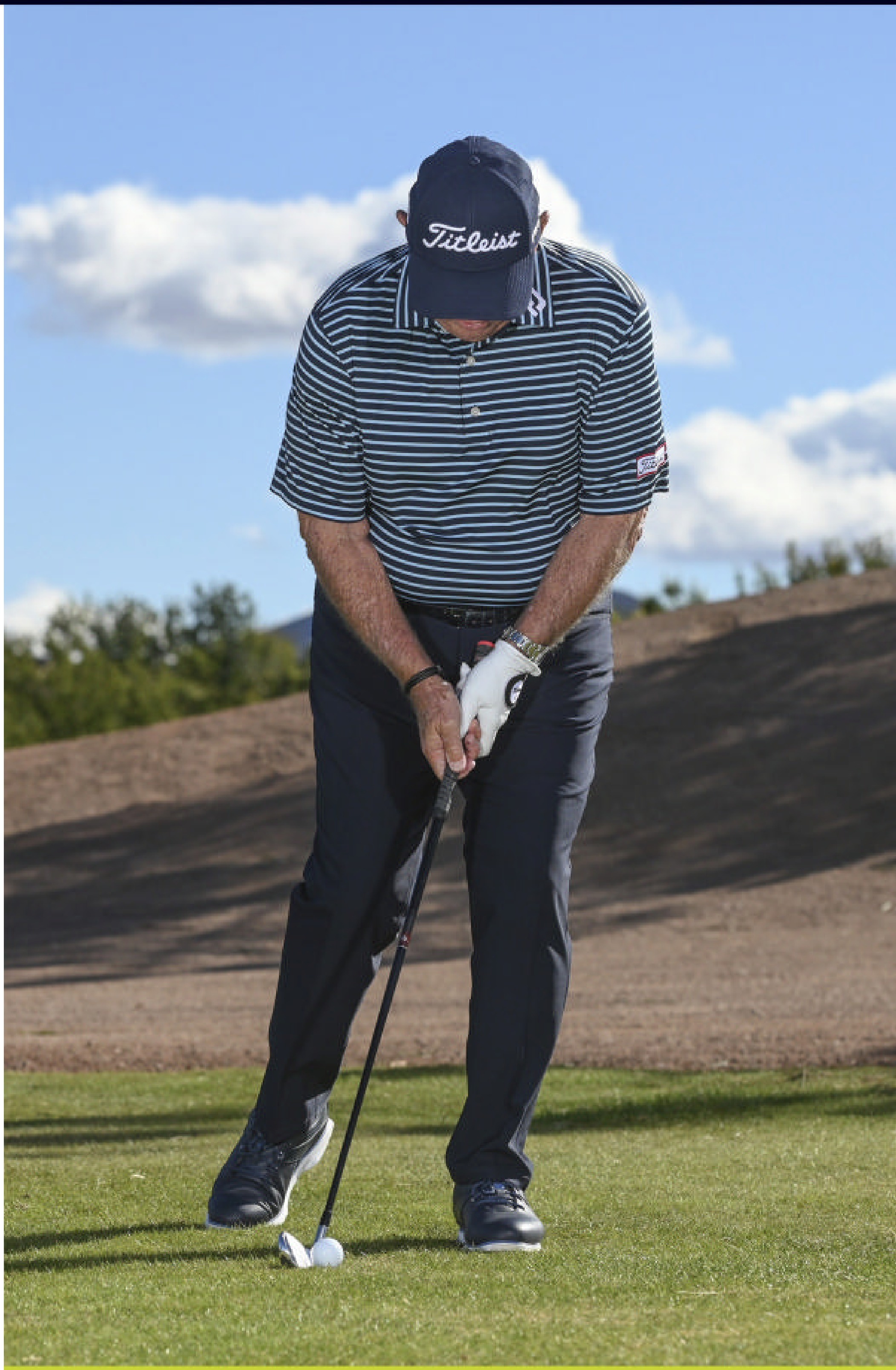
FAST FIX

Chipping looks so easy when you see the pros do it on TV. That's because they do two important things really well that most golfers don't. First, they aim the clubface, just like on a putt. Second, they make a slightly downward strike for consistent impact and spin. Amateurs tend to play the ball too far forward, and I rarely see them aiming the face. Even if they do get it solid, the ball doesn't go where they want.

These are easy adjustments you can make on the course. It's all about being organized in your setup. Start by standing with your trail foot so the instep is in line with the ball (*below*). Next, aim the clubface where you want the ball to start, considering any slope on the green. Then, push your weight and your hands a bit toward the target. Now you're ready to pinch the ball crisply off the grass and get it rolling on line.





FOREVER FIX

Setting up correctly should be fairly easy, but there is something I see in poor chippers that takes a little work to overcome. If you stub a lot of chips, catching the ground before the ball, you're probably freezing your body and flipping your trail hand at impact. Instead, let your body respond naturally to the swinging motion. That will keep the swing's low point forward for ball-then-turf contact. A good feel is the trail knee kicking in softly on the downswing to start the forward motion.

Here's my go-to drill for chipping: Take a normal setup—ball back, clubface at your target—then pull back your trail foot and set it up on its toes (*above*). Feel how this pushes weight to your front foot and sets your whole body ahead of the ball. Hit some chips from this stance. It'll keep your body center in the ideal impact position, so you can focus on just making a little turn through the ball.

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A golfer's incredible triumph just days after his father's sudden death

Conner Willett lost his father and then won the biggest event of his life in the same week. Here's his story

By Chris Jones | October 04, 2022

MONDAY

On July 11, Conner Willett, a 19-year-old with glasses and a golf tan, walked to the first tee at the Concord Country Club in suburban Boston to take his opening drive in the Massachusetts Amateur Championship. His uncle Bryan was his caddie. Unusually, the starter gave Conner a ball when he arrived. The initials "RW" had been written on it. Ethan Whitney, Conner's 19-year-old friend, playing ahead of him in the tournament, had left it for him on the tee box. The ball had sat like a pearl on the grass until the starter worried that someone else might pick it up, so he held onto it until Conner arrived. Conner nodded his thanks and handed the ball to Bryan to keep safe in his bag.

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BY E. MICHAEL JOHNSON

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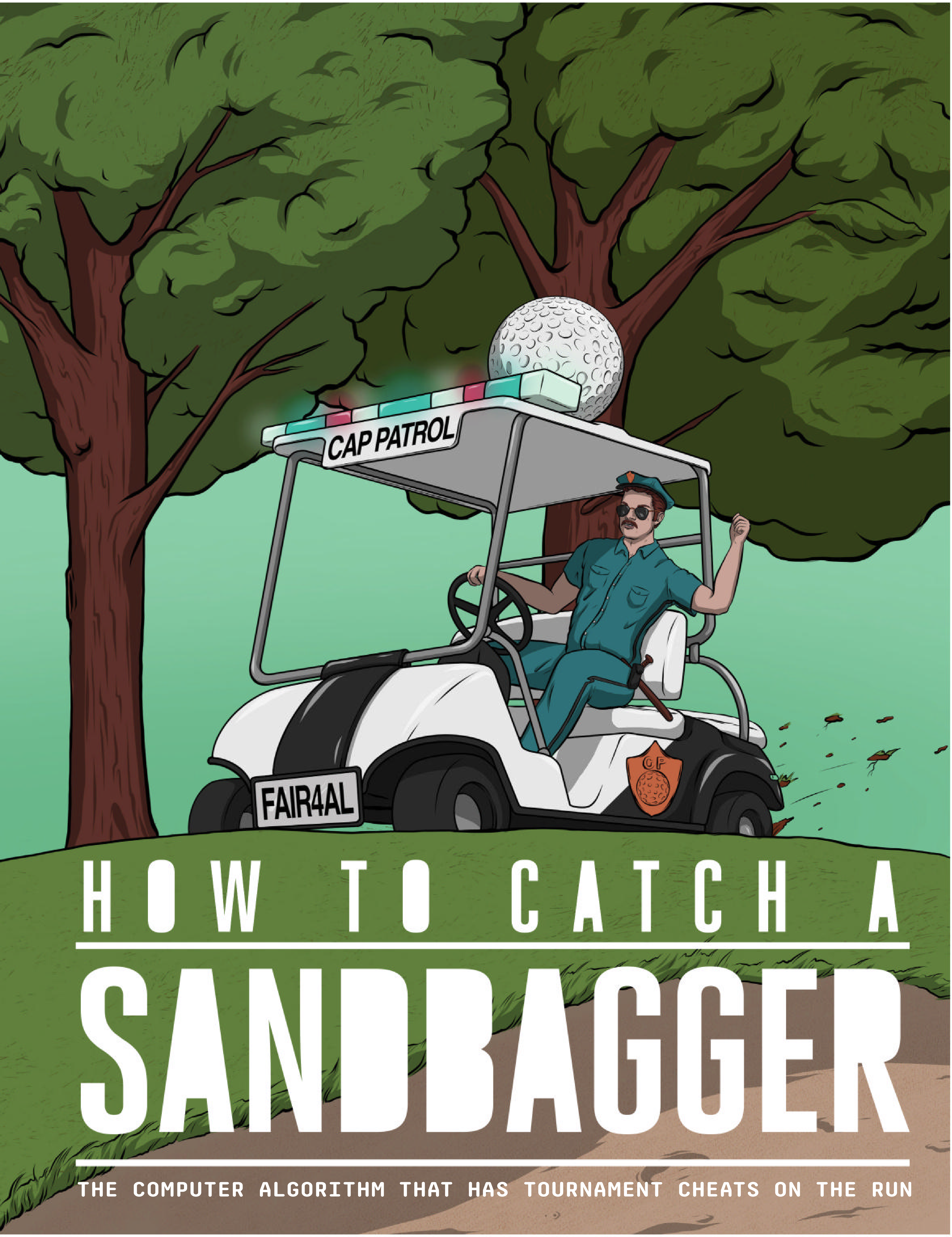
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HOW TO CATCH A SANDBAGGER

THE COMPUTER ALGORITHM THAT HAS TOURNAMENT CHEATS ON THE RUN

George Thurner remembers the phone call. The handicap chair of a prominent golf club reached out to him after the same player won all three of the major handicap events for two straight years. The club couldn't figure out how this accountant in his mid-50s was gaming the system. He was turning in all his scores, and the handicap committee checked with those he played with to make sure those scores were accurate. Still, he kept winning.

Although the club's handicap committee could not solve the issue, Thurner's "Cap Patrol" algorithm figured it out quickly. Comparing the scores revealed that others in his group always posted scores from the back tees, but the player in question always posted from the most forward tees—a 3.2-shot difference. "The club banned him from all events for life once the information was verified," Thurner says. "He ended up leaving the club."

We likely all know this kind of player: the golfer who always comes up big in net events. The talk varies from hushed whispers to outrage, but it revolves around a single word: sandbagger. That talk is habitually accompanied with a sense of resignation, along the lines of, "Dammit, Bill wins all the time, but what can we do about it?

It's why Thurner created Cap Patrol. The algorithm-based software program syncs with the U.S. Golf Association's Golf Handicap Information Network (GHIN) and course tee sheets and uses 43 data points over five primary criteria: Handicap Index during the past 12 months, home scores versus away scores, potential of the player, percentage of scores turned in and tournament finishes. Cap Patrol puts those numbers in a data blender and then recommends which handicaps need to be adjusted (and by how many strokes), as well as who to keep an eye on and who to leave alone.

Peer review is an integral part. If player A and player B are playing together, each receives a notification the next day detailing what score the other player turned in and from what tees. If player A shot a 79 but turned in an 82, player B will know that and be able to report it via the anonymous red flag feature on the app. In short, the system helps keep everybody honest. Besides catching sandbaggers, Cap Patrol identifies vanity handicaps and can recommend an adjustment up.

The system—currently used by 1,100 clubs and courses covering more than 620,000 golfers—was conceived by Thurner, a self-described data nerd from Cincinnati with a background in sports analytics. A member at Cincinnati's Hyde Park Golf & Country Club, Thurner sports a 0.4 Handicap Index and has served in several board positions, including club president, golf chairman and handicap chairman. "I've heard every sandbagging story imaginable," he says. "I was sick and tired of six to eight people at many clubs ruining the biggest events. I wanted to build something that took personality out of it, was data driven and helped courses deal with this issue."

The sandbagger maneuvers the GHIN system like a NASCAR driver navigating Daytona Speedway, knowing when to throttle back and when to hit the gas. These players know that posting a 78 is OK if a 74 is getting knocked out. Or they might post a score higher than what they shot when playing with partners who are relatively oblivious. They might also exploit the opportunity for a higher-than-normal "away" score at another course if verification is unlikely. Some freely add a stroke here or a few strokes there to their actual number or omit a handicap-damaging low score. "Some players never miss an opportunity to post a bad number," Thurner says.

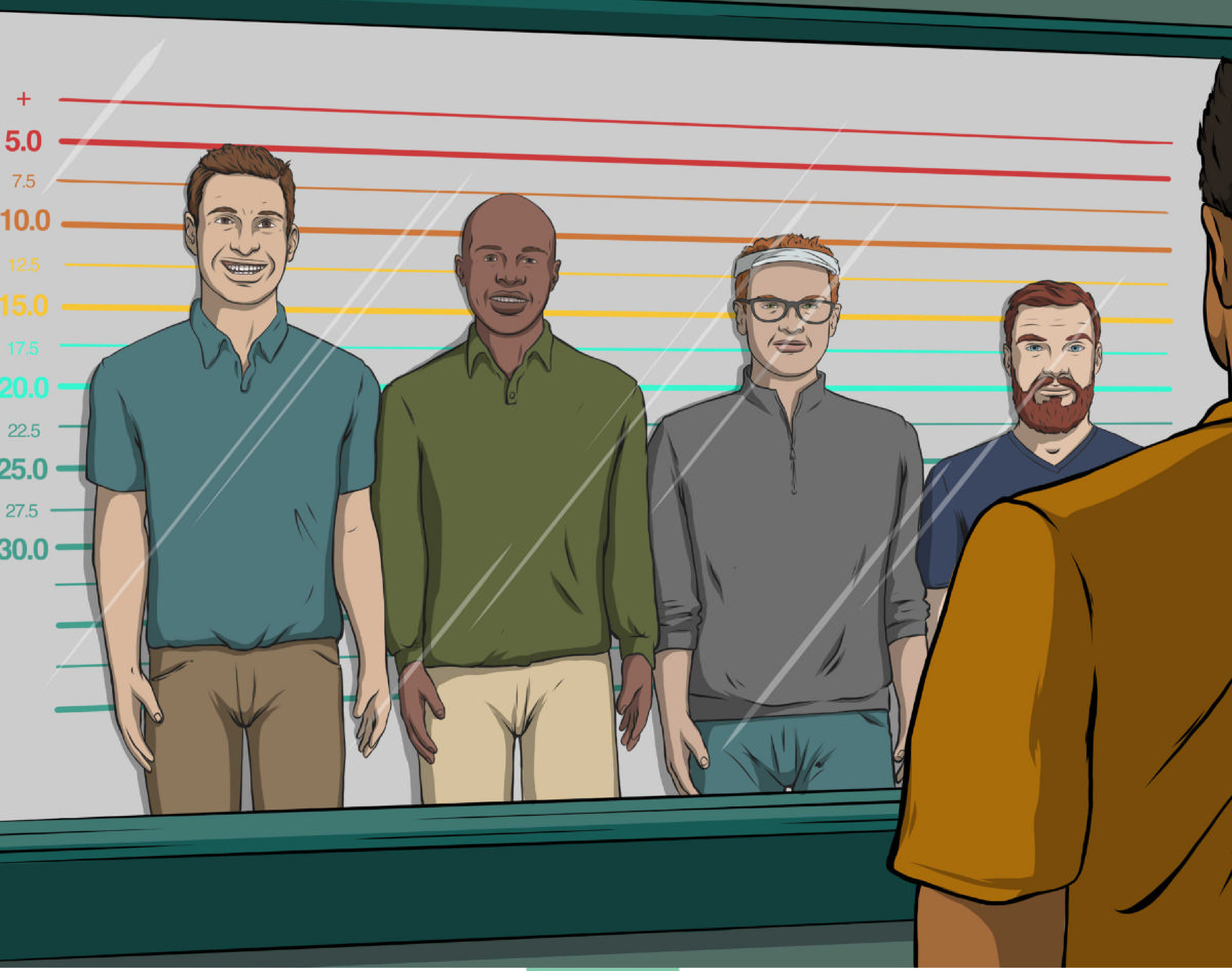
THE CLUB ADJUSTED SEVEN PEOPLE IN ONE MONTH. THE POINT WAS MADE. SINCE THEN, THE CLUB HAS NOT HAD A RUNAWAY WINNER.

However, one number can't be fudged, nudged or otherwise manipulated: tournament finishes. According to Thurner, the USGA and others have done significant research on how often a player should make the winner's podium. Golfers playing in a normal number of events (defined as eight during a two-year period) should place first no more than once and may have one other high finish, such as fourth place, in that eight-event span. Anything beyond that is not statistically reasonable.

The same people winning over and over not only creates a bad club vibe but can have a damaging effect on event participation. "Most clubs know who these people are," Thurner says. "They just don't know how to prove it."

Cary Cozby, head professional at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, remembers receiving a call from Devin Gee, head professional at Oakmont Country Club, an early adopter of Cap Patrol. "He encouraged me to spend time looking at it," Cozby says. Southern Hills has 812 members in its GHIN system, yet the club has had fewer adjustments than some others. (Thurner estimates 2 to 4 percent of all players need adjusting.) "We look at the reports twice a month," Cozby says. "We've only had five or six adjustments in three years, but we have one member who has been adjusted multiple times. His nickname is Kuchar because he always cashes. He even mentioned after one win, 'I'm so screwed now with Cap Patrol.' After looking at our most recent report, he is going to get knocked down another stroke plus."

With a more level playing field comes, hope-



fully, increased participation and a wider group of golfers winning. Thurner says his data shows that clubs using Cap Patrol average 55 percent more winners. If all of this sounds a little like George Orwell's Big Brother, well, that's the point. Thurner cites one player who won five events during a single season and played 25 percent better in tournaments than in casual rounds. However, according to Cap Patrol data, less than 2 percent of golfers play better in tournament rounds compared with casual rounds. Any golfer playing consistently more than 5 percent better in tournament rounds is statistically questionable, Thurner says.

Cap Patrol strives to be objective and take personality out of the equation, but the reality is anyone tagged for an adjustment is going to require a conversation, one that can be awkward. "We hear 'This is unfair. You guys are picking on me.' " Cozby says. "But it's the opposite. It's based on data. It also helps the behavior of everyone else. Members

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

THE FREQUENCY THAT A GIVEN HANDICAP SHOULD SHOOT A CAREER SCORE

0-HANDICAP	
65	24 YEARS
70	6 MONTHS

5-HANDICAP	
68	132 YEARS
72	5 YEARS
75	6 MONTHS

10-HANDICAP	
72	194 YEARS
75	18 YEARS
77	4.4 YEARS
80	6 MONTHS

15-HANDICAP	
78	32 YEARS
80	12 YEARS
82	3.4 YEARS
85	6 MONTHS

20-HANDICAP	
80	1,100 YEARS
82	62 YEARS
85	12 YEARS
87	3.4 YEARS
90	6 MONTHS

WHEN YOU'RE WINNING, YOUR HANDICAP INDEX SHOULD GO DOWN. FOR SOME, RIGHT BEFORE THE NEXT EVENT, IT GOES BACK UP.

hear a few guys get adjusted, and it makes them more aware of things such as how to properly post scores when matches end. We've seen an uptick in posting scores and doing so properly."

In fact, says Thurner, his data reveals that clubs using Cap Patrol for just one year experience a significant uptick in the percentage of scores posted, jumping from 60 percent pre-Cap Patrol to 86 percent afterward. Although a club and its committee receive a detailed deep dive that truly peels back the curtain on scoring, posting, trends and tournament finishes, all members receive free access to the Cap Patrol app. Some of the data is sure to lead to ribbing on the patio, but the app is meant to be more entertainment than accusatory.

The app features a Hot Gauge that indicates if you're currently ice cold, on fire or somewhere between. It calculates your clutch percentage (basically how you play in tournaments versus everyday play) and how you're trending. The app also provides a real-time club ranking of how you're faring against the rest of the club. You can also look up similar data on every other player at the club (but with no access to data from players at other clubs). Nowhere does it indicate whether you're looking at an adjustment or not.

Perhaps the most entertaining feature is the odds section, which calculates the probability of a certain handicap shooting a certain score. For example, a 72 shot by a 10-handicapper should happen once every 194 years, according to the USGA probability table. Anything over once every 16 years is beyond reasonable. The USGA allows Cap Patrol to use its probability statistics in the Cap Patrol app (*see sidebar at left*), but there's no formal partnership between the two.

The app has more useful purposes, too. If you're looking for a partner for an event, you can go to the partners section, and it lists every member with a handicap and color codes them red, orange, yellow, light blue, dark blue. Those in red probably have their text messages blowing up. Those in dark blue likely hear crickets.

Instead of throwing balls in the air or twirling a tee to decide teams for a friendly match, a matchup feature looks at each player's information and will calculate the most evenly matched teams for the day. Members of clubs tired of the "blind draw" events that always seem to have a few stacked teams can use the option for entering as many as 120 players and having the app figure out the most evenly matched foursomes for that tournament. According to Thurner, additional features are still to come, including one that will track pace of play and note who plays quickly and who is pokey. All that is nice, but the key feature—stopping sandbagging—remains central to the reasons for implementing the system.

One 100 Greatest private course in the Midwest has some 1,100 members in the GHIN system. "We have a very big member-guest event, and we had two members and their guests that just ran away with the tournament the past few years," said the handicap chairman. "When you're playing well and winning, your Handicap Index should be going down. It usually does go down, but for some, right before the next tournament, it goes right back up. Often, it's the same people. I don't want to be the hall monitor at my club. I just want a level playing field for everyone."

The club adjusted seven people in one month. The point was made. In the two years since, they have not had a runaway winner in any event—not that such parity makes everyone happy.

"I hear a lot of protests along the lines of 'But I'm a gamer' or 'I focus more on tournaments,' " Thurner says. "When I hear that, and they've been winning, what they're really saying is that their everyday Index is not reflective of their ability, which is what the USGA system is based off. I just respond, 'I couldn't agree with you more. That's why we're adjusting your Index to where it should be.' "

As Cozby says, "It's uncanny how good this system is at identifying those that need to be adjusted. Normally the thieves are ahead of the good guys. This changes that."

Wesley Turner, handicap chairman at Metairie Country Club in Louisiana, puts it bluntly. "The worst call I get is when members say they're not playing in an event because so and so is playing, and I know their handicap is not legit," he says. "The next worst is when they're playing a match and are calling me from the third hole to already complain about someone's number. Those situations help no one. We have had several events lately with better participation because of Cap Patrol. It takes a while to get member buy-in, but once you do, it's truly for the benefit of everyone."

So what does it cost? The current offer is a 60-day free trial. If the club decides to move forward, the annual fee is $6 per player Index with a max price of $3,600 if a club has more than 600 members. As one pro said, "We've had this hornet's nest hanging by the golf shop for a long time. Now it's finally time to take care of it. It's a little painful at first, but once it's gone, things are so much better."

Put another way, Bill is no longer going to be winning all the time.

WHO WILL BE CROWNED IN THE QUEEN CITY?

WELLS FARGO
CHAMPIONSHIP

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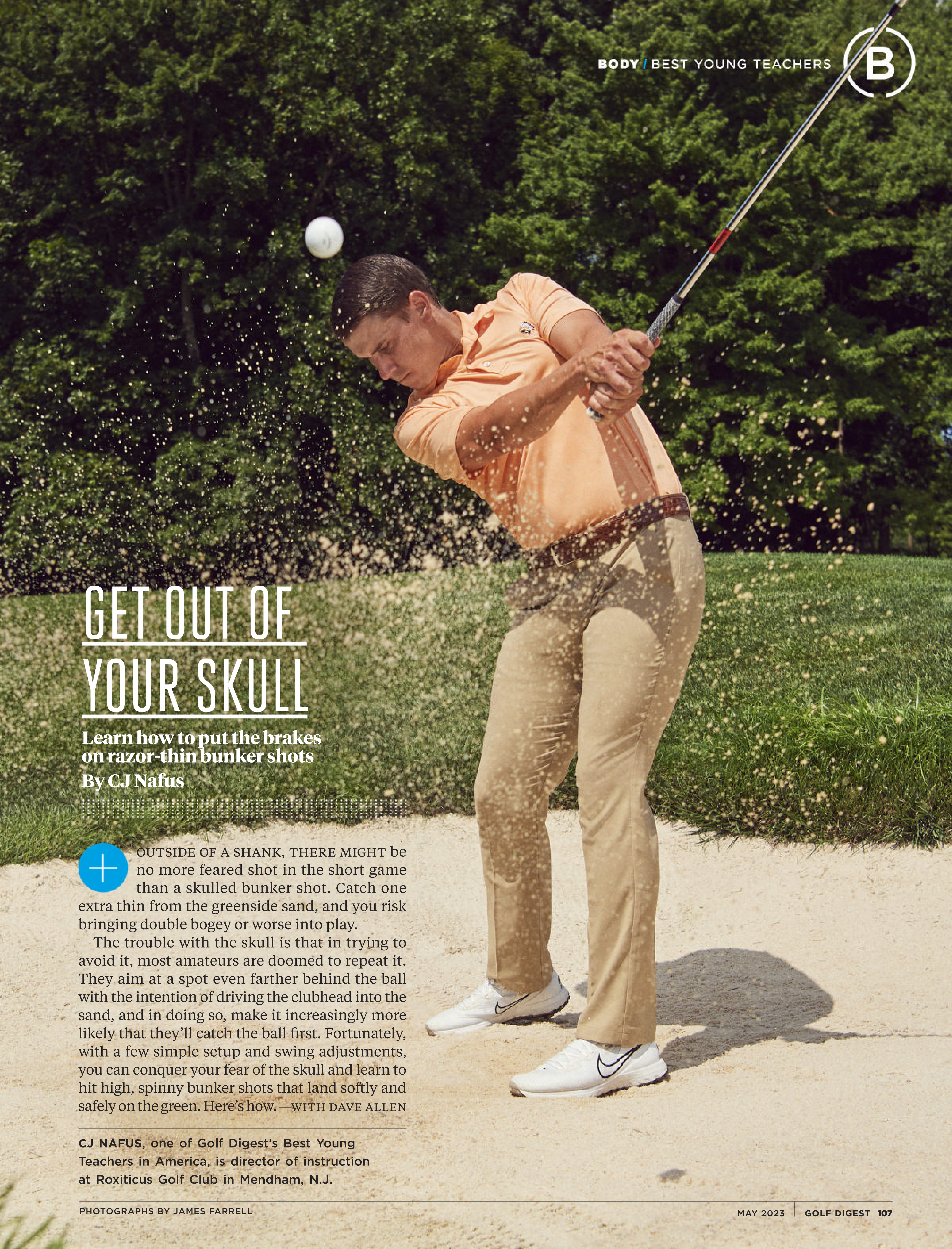


GET OUT OF YOUR SKULL

Learn how to put the brakes on razor-thin bunker shots

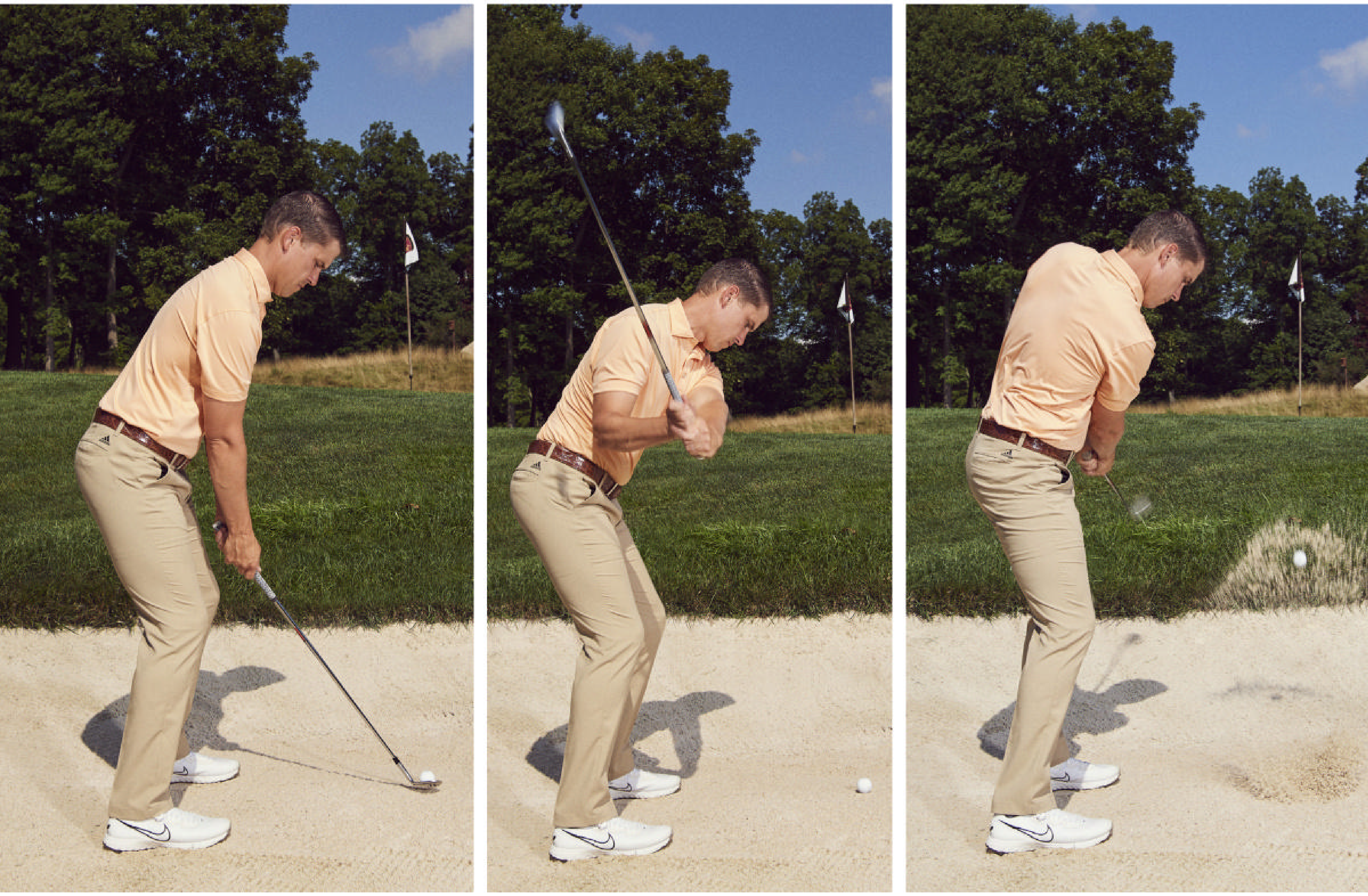
By CJ Nafus

OUTSIDE OF A SHANK, THERE MIGHT be no more feared shot in the short game than a skulled bunker shot. Catch one extra thin from the greenside sand, and you risk bringing double bogey or worse into play.

The trouble with the skull is that in trying to avoid it, most amateurs are doomed to repeat it. They aim at a spot even farther behind the ball with the intention of driving the clubhead into the sand, and in doing so, make it increasingly more likely that they'll catch the ball first. Fortunately, with a few simple setup and swing adjustments, you can conquer your fear of the skull and learn to hit high, spinny bunker shots that land softly and safely on the green. Here's how. —WITH DAVE ALLEN

CJ NAFUS, one of Golf Digest's Best Young Teachers in America, is director of instruction at Roxiticus Golf Club in Mendham, N.J.

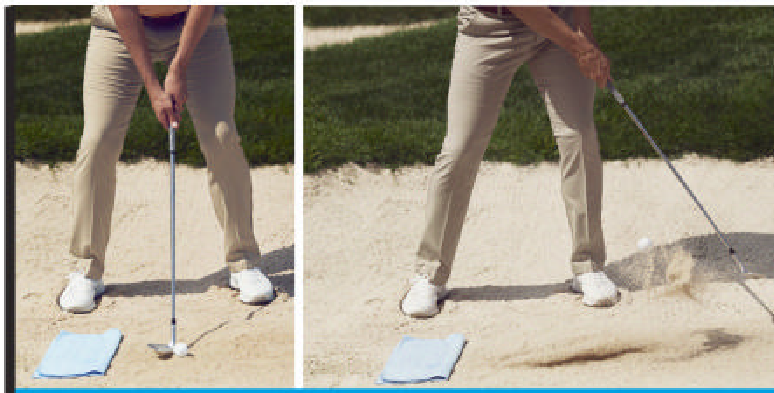
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES FARRELL



SQUARE UP TO SHALLOW YOUR ANGLE OF ATTACK

The first mistake amateurs make is that they set up too open—aimed left of their target (for righties)—at address. This encourages a steep, out-to-in downswing path and too sharp an entry into the sand, which causes the club to dig, not skim. Instead, set up with your shoulders square or slightly closed to the target—pointing right (*above, left*)—which will promote a shallow, in-to-out path and not as deep a divot. Position the ball directly opposite the logo on the left side of your chest and distribute your weight evenly on both feet. Next, dial the clubface open several degrees, then take your grip and lower the shaft and handle until the clubhead is level to the ground. This ensures the loft stays pointed at the target even when the face is open. All of these adjustments should put you in a better position to swing your arms more naturally and hit the spot you're looking at, about an inch or two behind the ball. If the clubhead enters the sand too far back—a common mistake with an overly steep swing—it's liable to be traveling upward when it finally reaches the ball, exposing the leading edge to the top half of the ball.

As for the swing, feel like you're lifting the club from underneath the grip and allow your trail arm to fold quicker on the backswing (*center*), which sets the club on the proper path. As the club enters the sand, imagine it's coming in on the same smooth landing angle as an airplane, cutting a shallow swath through the sand (*right*). Continue to swing and rehinge your arms after impact so that your follow-through matches the length of your backswing.



Drill: Refine your entry point

The following drill helps promote a more consistent entry point in the sand, and stops you from bottoming the club out too soon. Place a towel down approximately two clubhead-lengths behind a ball and hit some shots, missing the towel on the backswing and downswing. After a dozen balls, you should have a greater awareness of where the clubhead touches down, about one to two inches behind the ball. The better you get at it, the closer you can move the ball to the towel.

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RECAPTURE YOUR SWING

Use these strategies to get back to your best tempo

By Lynn Marriott & Pia Nilsson

AT SOME POINT OVER THE course of 18 holes, you're very likely to lose your good swing. It happens to even the best players. You miss a few fairways, and before you know it, that smooth, rhythmic swing you brought to the first six holes is suddenly gone. Here's the good news: No one ever loses their swing. It's still there, you just have to learn how to recognize when it goes bad and get out of your own way. Try our three strategies to help you find it again as fast as possible.

1 Ride your go-to shot for as long as necessary

● Obsessing about your swing when it goes awry is only going to make things worse. If you know you're going to lose it, have a strategy or plan B for getting it back. For example: What is a shot you know you can hit in the fairway or onto the green? Maybe it's a knockdown shot, as Pia is demonstrating above. Lean on your go-to shot until you get your feel back and leave the detailed swing analysis for after the round.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY J.D. CUBAN

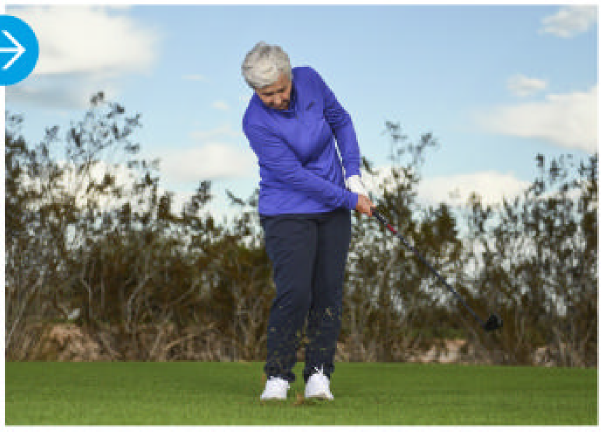
VISION54
54
PING
PING

2 Swing at 40-to-60 percent of your maximum speed

● Many golfers get very quick when they lose their swing, so it's good to slow everything down, especially your tempo. When you get over the ball, take a few deep breaths and long exhales and relax your upper body. Then, have the feeling that you're swinging at 40-to-60 percent of your maximum speed. This calmer tempo will help sync up your arms and body and get you swinging normal again.

3 Play with your feet together for better balance, control

● Some of our students have discovered that the easiest way to regain their feel is to play a hole with their feet close together (*right*). This simplifies your motion and gets you more centered and in balance. It also helps you feel more present in your body, so you don't start overthinking. After playing a hole with your feet together, try narrowing your normal stance, and if that feels good, then go back to standing wider.



LYNN MARRIOTT AND PIA NILSSON, both Golf Digest 50 Best Teachers, are co-founders of VISION54 in Scottsdale.

WHAT'S IN MY BAG : SEPP STRAKA

AGE 30

LIVES
Birmingham, Ala.

STORY
Won the 2022 Honda Classic.

CAREER SHOT
The 6-iron I hit into the final hole of the 2022 Honda Classic is one I'll never forget. It was raining hard, and Shane Lowry was playing behind me, so I didn't know what score I needed to win. I was going to hit a 7-iron but changed my mind when it started raining. I knew instantly I had flushed it. I hit the green and two-putted for birdie to defeat Lowry by one stroke.

—WITH DAVE ALLEN

CLUB	YARDS*
DRIVER	290
3-WOOD	270
7-WOOD	240
4-IRON	220
5-IRON	210
6-IRON	195
7-IRON	180
8-IRON	170
9-IRON	155
PW	140
52˚ WEDGE	125
56˚ WEDGE	110
60˚ WEDGE	95

* CARRY DISTANCE

DRIVER

SPECS TaylorMade Stealth 2 Plus, 9°, Fujikura Ventus Black 6X shaft.

The specs are pretty standard other than being a little upright. Forgiveness is the main thing I like about this club. By no means do I hit it far compared to a lot of the guys out here, but I'm fairly accurate for how far I drive it. That's definitely a strength of mine.

FAIRWAY WOODS

SPECS TaylorMade Stealth 2 Plus, 15°, Mitsubishi Tensei CK Pro White 80TX shaft; TaylorMade Stealth, 21°, Mitsubishi Tensei 1K Pro Orange 80TX shaft.

I've had this 7-wood since last April. It's great on par 5s because I can flight any trajectory I need into greens.

IRONS

SPECS Srixon ZX7 Mk II (4-iron through 9-iron), True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shafts, Golf Pride Tour Velvet grips.

I've always liked the look and feel of forged blade irons. I played the previous Srixon ZX7 irons, so these new ones aren't much of a change for me. The look is similar, but Srixon added weight behind the center of the face, which provides the feel I like.

WEDGES

SPECS Cleveland RTX ZipCore (46°, 52°, 56°, 60°), True Temper Dynamic Gold S400 shafts.

Having four wedges is critical for me. I play so many shots with them during a round. I find it's important to have more wedges than an extra long iron.

PUTTER

SPECS Odyssey Stroke Lab Tuttle, 35 inches, 2.5°, Stroke Lab Pistol grip.

This is the oldest club in my bag. I put this in play my rookie season of 2018-'19. I putted with a Rife Barbados mallet for a long time, and this has similar lines and a similar shape. It has a main aiming line in the middle plus two lines that kind of frame the ball. I've always liked that look to help with alignment.

WIND-CHEATER
My Srixon Z-Star Diamond is terrific in the wind. It doesn't get knocked around very much in crosswinds, and I get plenty of spin around the greens and with iron approach shots.

DRINK OF CHOICE
I've always loved Diet Coke. I drink one every morning. If I'm playing really bad, and I need to change something up, I'll have one. It shakes up the momentum a bit. It always works.

LOCAL FLAVOR
Shoal Creek and Greystone in Birmingham, Ala., are the courses I play most in the area. I have plenty of these ball markers because I can just reach in and grab some when I'm home.

JENNIFER PEREZ/PGA TOUR/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOM FURORE

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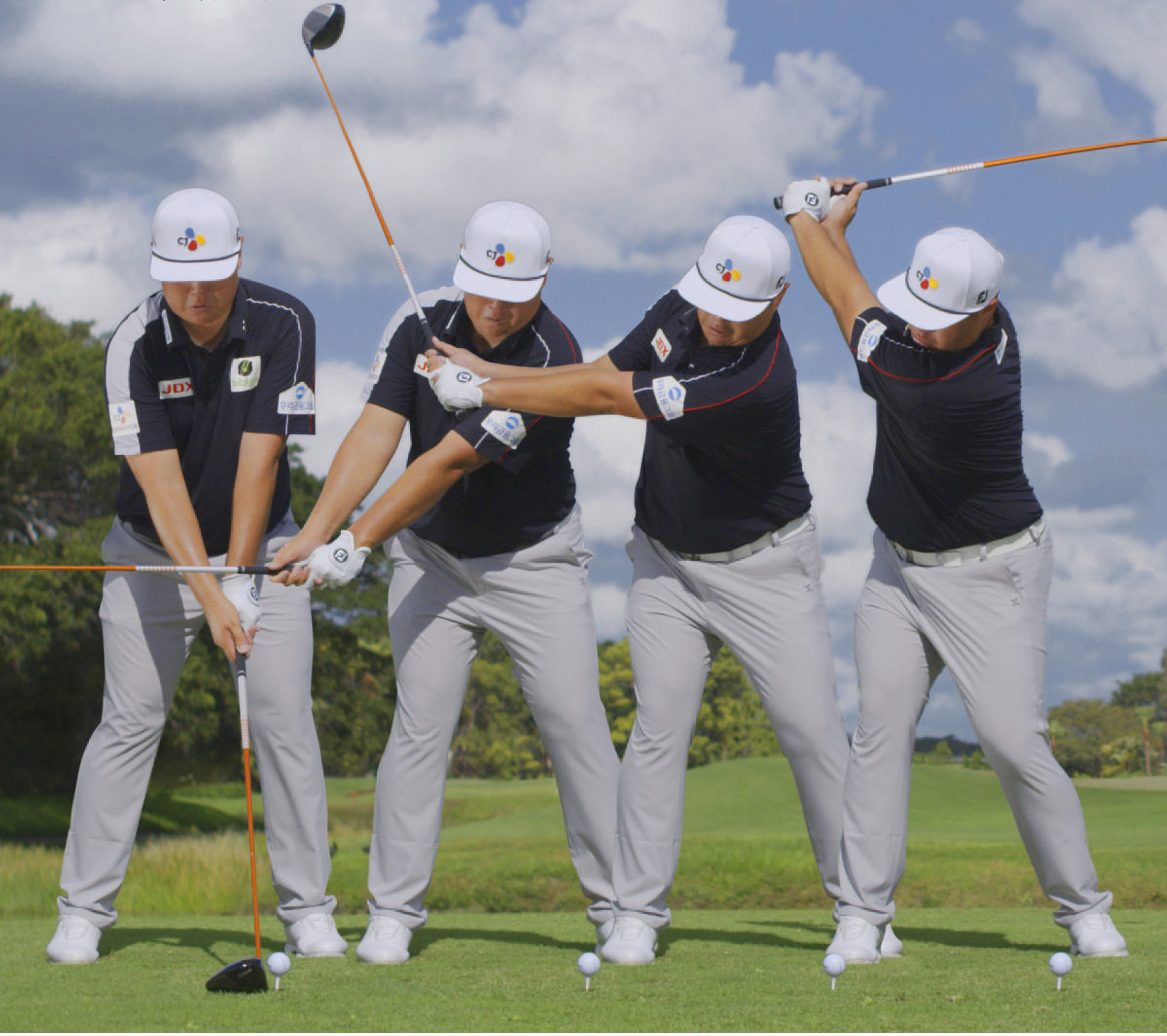


STEADY AS HE GOES

Sungjae Im's backswing is a big key to his consistency

By Dave Allen

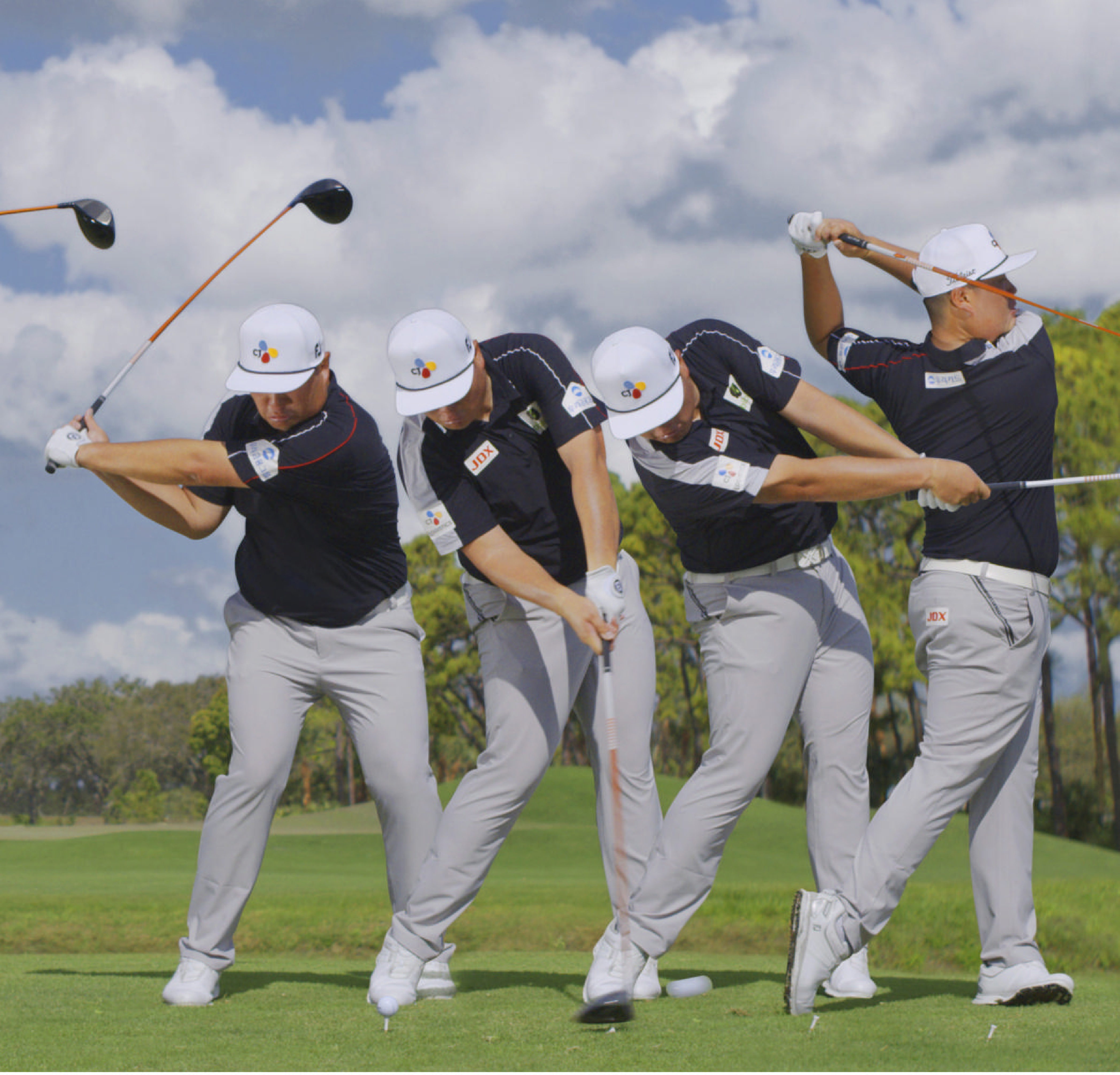
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF players with unorthodox backswings—Jim Furyk, Matthew Wolff, John Daly, just to name a few—but certainly no one has a slower backswing than Sungjae Im. The first half of Im's backswing is so deliberate, it almost looks like it's in slow motion.

Unhappy with his ball-striking while on the Japan Tour in 2016, Im decided one day in practice to slow down his takeaway. What started as a drill has now evolved into the South Korean's signature move.

"I started to see more consistency in my tempo and ball flight when I took it away slower," says the 25-year-old Im, the PGA Tour's Rookie of the Year in 2018-'19. "So I just continued to do it."

One of the more accurate drivers on the PGA Tour—he ranked 25th in driving accuracy (64 percent) and 13th in total driving through this year's Valspar Championship—Im has the length to reach most par 5s in two, as well. The two-time PGA Tour winner has been carving up the par 5s this season with a scoring average of 4.39 strokes,

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOM FURORE



third best on tour. Im credits much of his power to his workout regimen and the extension he's able to create on the takeaway and just after impact, when the shaft is parallel to the ground, two positions that nearly mirror themselves.

"I feel like this is the way to generate the most power—extend my arms as far as possible," Im says. "Although my takeaway might look slow and awkward, I do generate a lot of power and accuracy by extending my arms."

Another key to Im's power and consistency is a change he has made to his lead-wrist position at the top of the backswing. In his first few years on tour, Im had a tendency to cup his left wrist at the top, which opened the clubface. Now he's trying to consciously keep that wrist flatter while lowering the shaft on the backswing, two moves that make it easier to swing the club down from the inside and hit the draw he favors off the tee.

Im is also constantly working on finding the proper balance between his hand and body movements, especially on the backswing. The more in sync they are, the farther he's able to turn his chest and shoulders, generating more speed and power on the downswing.

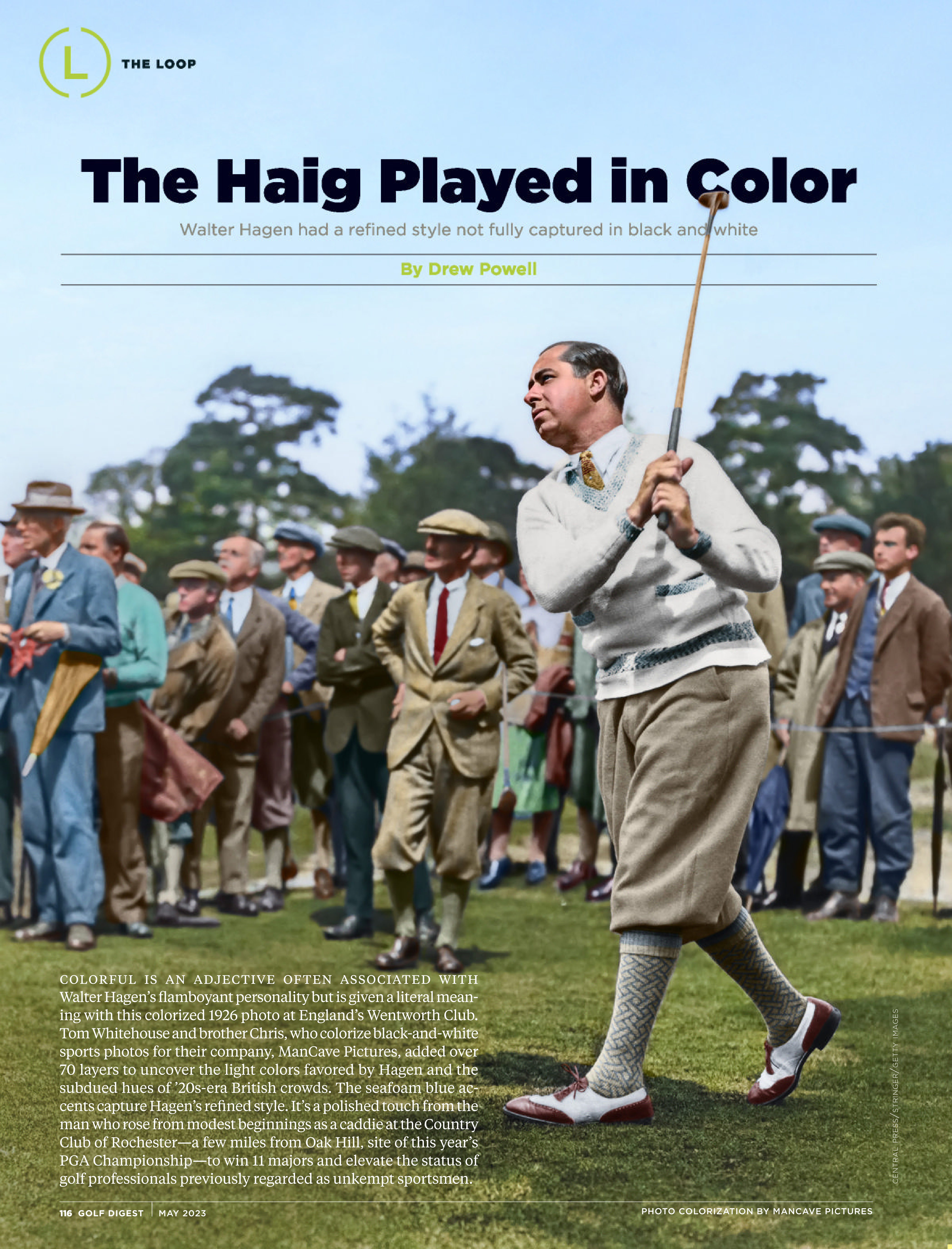
"I'm trying to keep them all aligned together," Im says. "I have a tendency to swing my hands first, so they get out of alignment with my body. If I can find the right balance where I'm using both my hands and body together, and turning my chest with my hands, my swing is very strong."

Interviewed with help from Sungjae Im's translator and agent, Danny Oh.

The Haig Played in Color

Walter Hagen had a refined style not fully captured in black and white

By Drew Powell



COLORFUL IS AN ADJECTIVE OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH Walter Hagen's flamboyant personality but is given a literal meaning with this colorized 1926 photo at England's Wentworth Club. Tom Whitehouse and brother Chris, who colorize black-and-white sports photos for their company, ManCave Pictures, added over 70 layers to uncover the light colors favored by Hagen and the subdued hues of '20s-era British crowds. The seafoam blue accents capture Hagen's refined style. It's a polished touch from the man who rose from modest beginnings as a caddie at the Country Club of Rochester—a few miles from Oak Hill, site of this year's PGA Championship—to win 11 majors and elevate the status of golf professionals previously regarded as unkempt sportsmen.

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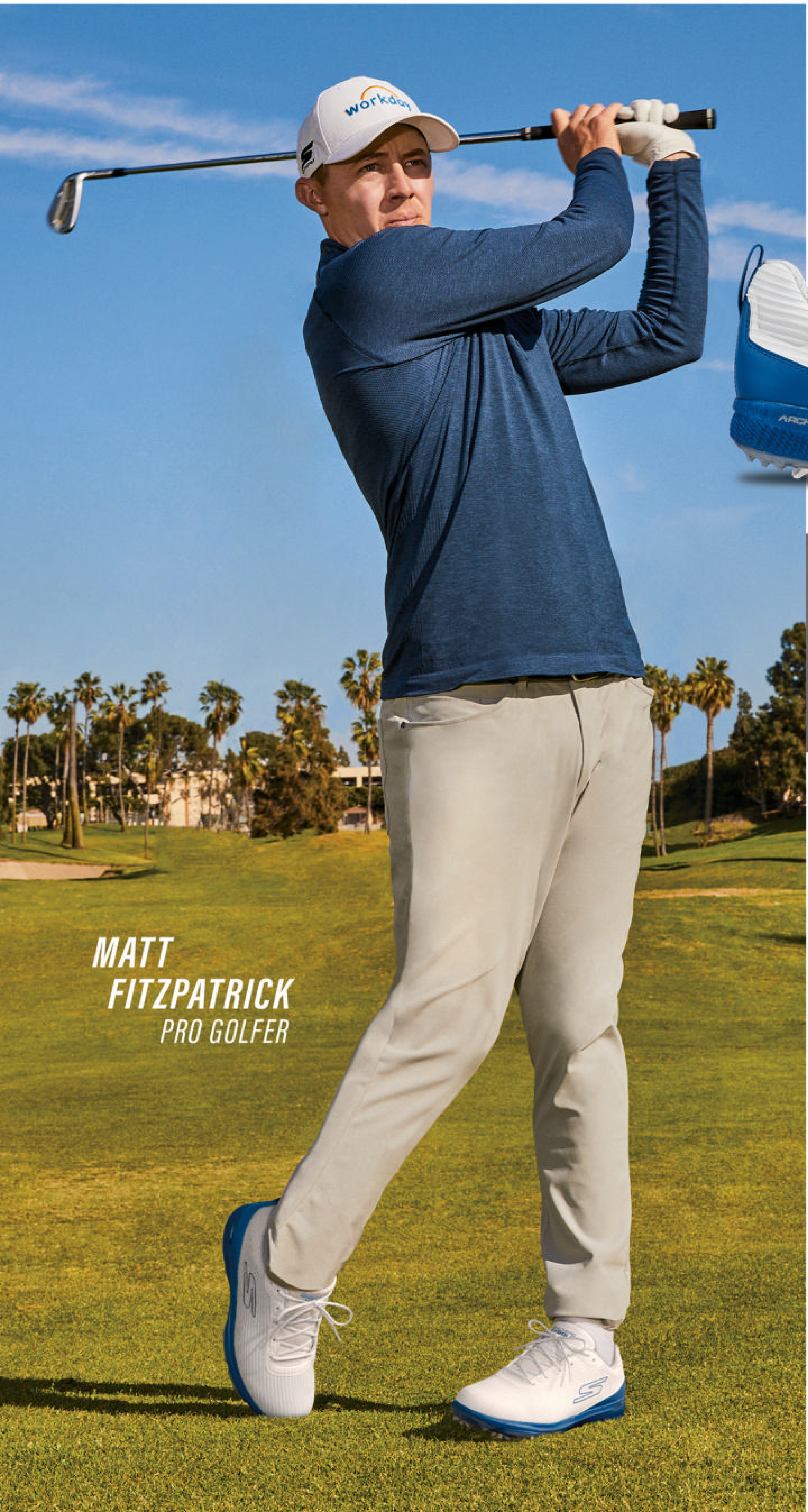
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RORY MCILROY'S CHOICE

As the champion of four Major tournaments, Rory McIlroy knows exactly what it takes to reach the top. Throughout his career, he has spent every hour dedicated to the sport he loves, mastering the art of precision, power and hard work. That choice has led to a position amongst the world's best golfers, with numerous titles to his name, and a legacy that will live on for generations to come.

Ω
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